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Dwight Macdonald

MASSCULT AND MIDCULT[1]

For about two centuries Western culture has in fact been two cultures: the traditional kind—let us call it High Culture—that is chronicled in the textbooks, and a novel kind that is manufactured for the market. This latter may be called Mass Culture, or better Masscult, since it really isn't culture at all. Masscult is a parody of High Culture. In the older forms, its artisans have long been at work. In the novel, the line stretches from the 18th-century "servant-girl romances" to Edna Ferber, Fannie Hurst and such current ephemera as Burdick, Drury, Michener, Ruark and Uris; in music, from Hearts and Flowers to Rock 'n Roll; in art, from the chromo to Norman Rockwell; in architecture, from Victorian Gothic to ranch-house moderne; in thought, from Martin Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy* ("Marry not without means, for so shouldst thou tempt

1 In this first part of a two-part article, I try to define the peculiar quality of what is sometimes called "popular culture." I prefer the term "mass culture," since "popular culture" implies a spontaneity and an authenticity which is a quality of folk art but is not a quality of what I'm writing about. Part Two will deal with middlebrow culture (Midcult), that compromise between High and Mass Culture which has become the chief threat to the former in this country, and will also consider the objections of such writers as Daniel Bell, Denis Brogan, Gilbert Seldes and Edward Shils to the ideas here advanced. I first crystallized my ideas about Masscult in an article in *Politics* (February, 1944) titled "A Theory of Popular Culture"; this was recapitulated, with extensive additions and deletions, in "A Theory of Mass Culture" in the Summer, 1953, issue of *Diogenes*; and the present article, with even more extensive additions and deletions, will form the first chapter of a book on the subject that Random House will publish next year.

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Providence;/But wait not for more than enough, for marriage is the DUTY of most men.") to Norman Vincent Peale. (Thinkers like H. G. Wells, Stuart Chase, and Max Lerner come under the head of Midcult rather than Masscult.) And the enormous output of such new media as the radio, television and the movies is almost entirely Masscult.

I

This is something new in history. It is not that so much bad art is being produced. Most High Culture has been undistinguished, since talent is always rare—one has only to walk through any great art museum or try to read some of the forgotten books from past centuries. Since only the best works still have currency, one thinks of the past in their terms, but they were really just a few plums in a vast tasteless pudding of mediocrity.

Masscult is bad in a new way: it doesn't even have the theoretical possibility of being good. Up to the 18th century, bad art was of the same nature as good art, produced for the same audience, accepting the same standards. The difference was simply one of individual talent. But Masscult is something else again. It is not just unsuccessful art. It is non-art. It is even anti-art.

There is a novel of the masses but no Stendhal of the masses; a music for the masses but no Bach or Beethoven, whatever people say... [Andre Malraux observes in "Art, Popular Art and the Illusion of the Folk"—(*Partisan Review,* Sept.-Oct. 1951)]... It is odd that no word . . . designates the common character of what we call, separately, bad painting, bad architecture, bad music, etc. The word "painting" only designates a domain in which art is possible . . . Perhaps we have only one word because bad painting has not existed for very long. There is no bad Gothic painting. Not that all Gothic painting is good. But the difference that separates Giotto from the most mediocre of his imitators is not of the same kind as that which separates Renoir from the caricaturists of *La*

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Vie Parisienne . . . Giotto and the Gaddi are separated by talent, Degas and Bonnat by a schism, Renoir and "suggestive" painting by what? By the fact that this last, totally subjected to the spectator, is a form of advertising which aims at selling itself. If there exists only one word . . . it is because there was a time when the distinction between them had no point. Instruments played real music then, for there was no other.

But now we have pianos playing Rock 'n Roll and *les sanglots longs de violins* accompanying torch singers.

Masscult offers its customers neither an emotional catharsis nor an esthetic experience, for these demand effort. The production line grinds out a uniform product whose humble aim is not even entertainment, for this too implies life and hence effort, but merely distraction. It may be stimulating or narcotic, but it must be easy to assimilate. It asks nothing of its audience, for it is "totally subjected to the spectator." And it gives nothing.[2]

Some of its producers are able enough. Norman Rockwell is technically skilled, as was Meissonier—though Degas was right when he summed up the cavalry charge in *Friedland, 1806*: "Everything is steel except the breastplates." O. Henry could tell a story better than many contributors to our Little Magazines. But a work of High Culture, however inept, is an expression of feelings, ideas, tastes, visions that are idiosyncratic and the audience similarly responds to them as individuals. Furthermore, both creator and audience accept certain standards. These may be more or less traditional; sometimes they are so much less so as to be revolutionary, though Picasso, Joyce and Stravinsky knew and respected past achievements more than did their

2 "Distraction is bound to the present mode of production, to the rationalized and mechanized process of labor to which . . . the masses are subject . . . People want to have fun. A fully concentrated and conscious experience of art is possible only to those whose lives do not put such a strain on them that in their spare time they want relief from both boredom and effort simultaneously. The whole sphere of cheap commercial entertainment reflects this dual desire." — T. W. Adorno: *On Popular Music.*

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academic contemporaries; their works may be seen as a heroic break-through to earlier, sounder foundations that had been obscured by the fashionable gimcrackery of the academies. But Masscult is indifferent to standards, brushing aside both tradition and innovation if they don't sell goods on the maximum market. Nor is there any communication between individuals. Those who consume Masscult might as well be eating ice-cream sodas, while those who fabricate it are no more expressing themselves than are the "stylists" who design the latest atrocity from Detroit.

The difference appears if we compare two famous writers of detective stories, Mr. Erle Stanley Gardner and Mr. Edgar Allan Poe. It is impossible to find any personal note in Mr. Gardner's enormous output—he has just celebrated his centenary, the hundredth novel under his own name (he also has knocked off several dozen under pseudonyms). His prose style varies between the incompetent and the non-existent; for the most part, there is just no style, either good or bad. His books seem to have been manufactured rather than composed; they are assembled with the minimum expenditure of effort from identical parts that are shifted about just enough to allow the title to be changed from *The Case of the Curious Bride* to *The Case of the Fugitive Nurse*. Mr. Gardner obviously has the production-line fertility. His popularity indicates he has the Very Good as a lawyer, Good as a business analyst, and Zero as a writer, and the last realistic estimate is the clue to his production-line fertility—and his popularity indicates he has the problem of distribution well in hand. He is marketing a standard product, like Kleenex, that precisely because it is not related to any individual needs on the part of either the producer or the consumer appeals to the widest possible audience. The obsession of our fact-minded culture with the processes of the law is probably the lowest common denominator that has made Mr. Gardner's unromantic romances such dependable commodities ever since *The Case of the Velvet Claws* (1933).

Like Mr. Gardner, Mr. Poe was a money-writer. (That he

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didn't make any is irrelevant.) The difference, aside from the fact that he was a good writer, is that, even when he was turning out hack work, he had an extraordinary ability to use the journalistic forms of his day to express his own peculiar personality, and indeed, as Marie Bonaparte has shown in her fascinating study, to relieve his neurotic anxieties. (It is simply impossible to imagine Mr. Gardner afflicted with anything as individual as a neurosis.) The book review, the macabre-romantic tale, the magazine poem, all served his purposes, and he even invented a new one, the detective story, which satisfied the two chief and oddly disparate drives in his psychology—fascination with horror (*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*) and obsession with logical reasoning or, as he called it, "ratiocination" (*The Purloined Letter*). So that while his works are sometimes absurd, they are rarely dull.

It is important to understand that the difference between Mr. Poe and Mr. Gardner, or between High Culture and Masscult, is not mere popularity. From *Tom Jones* to the films of Chaplin, some very good things have been popular; *The Education of Henry Adams* was the top non-fiction best-seller of 1919, according to Alice Payne Hackett's *Sixty Years of Best-Sellers*. Nor is it that Poe's detective stories are harder to read than Gardner's, though I suppose they are for most people. The difference lies in the qualities of Masscult already noted: its impersonality and its lack of standards, and "total subjection to the spectator." The same writer, indeed the same book or even the same chapter, may contain elements of both Masscult and High Culture. In Balzac, for instance, the most acute psychological analysis and social observation is bewilderingly interlarded with the cheapest, flimsiest kind of melodrama. In Dickens, superb comedy alternates with bathetic sentimentality, great descriptive prose with the most vulgar kind of theatricality. All these elements were bound between the same covers, sold to the same mass audience, and, it may well be, considered equally good by their authors—at least I know of no evidence that either

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Dickens or Balzac was aware of when he was writing down and when he was writing up. Masscult is a subtler problem than is sometimes recognized.

"What is a poet?" asked Wordsworth. "He is a man speaking to men . . . a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and one who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him." It is this human dialogue that Masscult interrupts, this spirit of life that it exterminates. Evelyn Waugh commented on Hollywood, after a brief experience there: "Each book purchased for motion pictures has some individual quality, good or bad, that has made it remarkable. It is the work of a great array of highly paid and incompatible writers to distinguish this quality, separate it and obliterate it." This process is called "licking the book"—i.e., licking it into shape, as mother bears were once thought to lick their amorphous cubs into real bears; though here the process is reversed and the book is licked not into but out of shape. The other meaning of "licked" also applies; before a proper Hollywood film can be made, the work of art has to be defeated.

II

The question of Masscult is part of the larger question of the masses. The tendency of modern industrial society, whether in the USA or the USSR, is to transform the individual into the mass man. For the masses are in historical time what a crowd is in space: a large quantity of people unable to express their human qualities because they are related to each other neither as individuals nor as members of a community. In fact, they are not related *to each other* at all but only to some impersonal, abstract, crystallizing factor. In the case of crowds, this can be a football game, a bargain sale, a lynching; in the case of the masses, it can be a political party, a television program, a system of industrial production. The mass man is a solitary atom, uniform with the millions of other atoms that go to make up "the lonely crowd," as David Riesman well calls our society. A

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community, on the contrary, is a group of individuals linked to each other by concrete interests. Something like a family, each of whose members has his or her special place and function while at the same time sharing the group's economic aims (family budget), traditions (family history), sentiments (family quarrels, family jokes), and values ("That's the way we do it in *this* family!"). The scale must be small enough so that it "makes a difference" what each person does—this is the first condition for human, as against mass, existence. Paradoxically, the individual in a community is both more closely integrated into the group than is the mass man and at the same time is freer to develop his own special personality. Indeed, an individual can only be defined in relation to a community. A single person in nature is not an individual but an animal; Robinson Crusoe was saved by Friday. The totalitarian regimes, which have consciously tried to create the mass man, have systematically broken every communal link—family, church, trade union, local and regional loyalties, even down to ski and chess clubs—and have reforged them so as to bind each atomized individual directly to the center of power.

The past cultures I admire—Periclean Greece, the city-states of the Italian Renaissance, Elizabethan England are examples—have mostly been produced by communities, and remarkably small ones at that. Also remarkably heterogeneous ones, riven by faction, stormy with passionate antagonisms. But this diversity, fatal to that achievement of power over other countries that is the great aim of modern statecraft, seems to have been stimulating to talent. (What could be more deadly than the usual post-Marx vision of socialism as equality and agreement? Fourier was far more perceptive when he based his Utopia on cabals, rivalry, and every kind of difference including what he called "innocent mania.") A mass society, like a crowd, is inchoate and uncreative. Its atoms cohere not according to individual liking or traditions or even interests but in a purely mechanical way, as iron filings of different shapes and sizes are

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pulled toward a magnet working on the one quality they have in common. Its morality sinks to the level of the most primitive members—a crowd will commit atrocities that very few of its members would commit as individuals—and its taste to that of the least sensitive and the most ignorant.

Yet this collective monstrosity, "the masses," "the public," is taken as a human norm by the technicians of Masscult. They at once degrade the public by treating it as an object, to be handled with the lack of ceremony of medical students dissecting a corpse, and at the same time flatter it and pander to its taste and ideas by taking them as the criterion of reality (in the case of the questionnaire-sociologists) or of art (in the case of the Lords of Masscult). When one hears a questionnaire-sociologist talk about "setting up" an investigation, one realizes that he regards people as mere congeries of conditioned reflexes, his concern being which reflex will be stimulated by which question. At the same time, of necessity, he sees the statistical majority as the great Reality, the secret of life he is trying to unriddle. Like a Lord of Masscult, he is—professionally—without values, willing to take seriously any idiocy if it is held by many people (though, of course, *personally* . . .) The aristocrat's approach to the masses is less degrading to them, as it is less degrading to a man to be shouted at than to be treated as nonexistent. But the *plebs* have their dialectical revenge: indifference to their human quality means prostration before their statistical quantity, so that a movie magnate who cynically "gives the public what it wants"—i.e., assumes it wants trash—sweats with anxiety if the box-office returns drop five per cent.

Whenever a Lord of Masscult is reproached for the low quality of his products, he automatically ripostes, "But that's what the public wants, what can I do?" A simple and conclusive defense, at first glance. But a second look reveals that (1) to the extent the public "wants" it, the public has been conditioned to some extent by his products, and (2) his efforts have taken

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this direction because (a) he himself also "wants" it—never underestimate the ignorance and vulgarity of publishers, movie producers, network executives and other architects of Masscult—and (b) the technology of producing mass "entertainment" (again, the quotes are advised) imposes a simplistic, repetitious pattern so that it is easier to say the public wants this than to say the truth which is that the public gets this and so wants it. The March Hare explained to Alice that "I like what I get" is not the same thing as "I get what I like," but March Hares have never been welcome on Madison Avenue.

For some reason, objections to the giving-the-public-what-it-wants line are often attacked as undemocratic and snobbish. Yet it is precisely because I do believe in the potentialities of ordinary people that I criticise Masscult. For the masses are not people, they are not The Man in the Street or The Average Man, they are not even that figment of liberal condescension, The Common Man. The masses are, rather, man as non-man, that is man in a special relationship to other men that makes it impossible for him to function as man (one of the human functions being the creation and enjoyment of works of art). "Mass man," as I use the term, is a theoretical construction, an extreme toward which we are being pushed but which we shall never reach. For to become wholly a mass man would mean to have no private life, no personal desires, hobbies, aspirations, or aversions that are not shared by everybody else. One's behavior would be entirely predictable, like a piece of coal, and the sociologists could at last make up their tables confidently. It is still some time to 1984 but it looks unlikely that Orwell's anti-Utopia will have materialized by then, or that it will ever materialize. Nazism and Soviet Communism, however, show us how far things can go in politics, as Masscult does in art. And let us not be too smug in this American temperate zone, unravaged by war and ideology. "It seems to me that nearly the whole Anglo-Saxon race, especially of course in America, have lost the power to be individuals. They have become social insects

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like bees and ants." So Roger Fry wrote years ago and who will say that we have become less apian?

III

Like the early capitalism Marx and Engels described in *The Communist Manifesto,* Masscult is a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, and taste, dissolving all cultural distinctions. It mixes, scrambles everything together, producing what might be called homogenized culture, after another American achievement, the homogenization process that distributes the globules of cream evenly throughout the milk instead of allowing them to float separately on top. The interesting difference is that whereas the cream is still in the homogenized milk, somehow is disappears from homogenized culture. For the process destroys all values, since value-judgments require discrimination, an ugly word in liberal-democratic America. Masscult is very, very democratic; it refuses to discriminate against or between anything or anybody. All is grist to its mill and all comes out finely ground indeed.[3]

Life is a typical homogenized magazine, appearing on the mahogany library tables of the rich, the glass cocktail tables of the middleclass, and the oilcloth kitchen tables of the poor. Its contents are as thoroughly homogenized as its circulation. The same issue will present a serious exposition of atomic energy followed by a disquisition on Rita Hayworth's love life; photos of starving children picking garbage in Calcutta and of sleek

3 "I know thy works, that thou are neither cold nor hot. I would thou were cold or hot.

"So then because thou art lukewarm . . . I will spew thee out of my mouth.

"Because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thy eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." —Revelations, III, 15-18.

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models wearing adhesive brassieres; an editorial hailing Bertrand Russell's eightieth birthday (A GREAT MIND IS STILL ANNOYING AND ADORNING OUR AGE) across from a full-page photo of a matron arguing with a baseball umpire (MOM GETS THUMB); nine color pages of Renoir paintings followed by a picture of a roller-skating horse; a cover announcing in the same size type two features: A NEW FOREIGN POLICY, BY JOHN FOSTER DULLES and KERIMA: HER MARATHON KISS IS A MOVIE SENSATION.[4] Somehow these scramblings together seem to work all one way, degrading the serious rather than elevating the frivolous. Defenders of our Masscult society like Professor Edward Shils of the University of Chicago—he is, of course, a sociologist—see phenomena like *Life* as inspiriting attempts at popular education—just think, nine pages of Renoirs! But that roller-skating horse comes along, and the final impression is that both Renoir and the horse were talented.

IV

The historical reasons for the rise of Masscult are well-known. There could obviously be no mass culture until there were masses, in our modern sense. The industrial revolution produced the masses. It uprooted people from their agrarian communities and packed them into factory cities. It produced goods in such unprecedented abundance that the population of the Western world has increased more in the last two centuries

4 The advertisements provide even more scope for the editors' homogenizing talents, as when a full-page photo of a ragged Bolivian peon grinningly drunk on coca leaves (which Mr. Luce's conscientious reporters tell us he chews to narcotize his chronic hunger pains) appears opposite an ad of a pretty, smiling, welldressed American mother with her two pretty-smiling-welldressed children (a boy and a girl, of course—children are always homogenized in our ads) looking raptly at a clown on a TV set, the whole captioned in type big enough to announce the Second Coming: RCA VICTOR BRINGS YOU A NEW KIND OF TELEVISION—SUPER SETS WITH "PICTURE POWER." The peon would doubtless find the juxtaposition piquant if he could afford a copy of *Life*, which, luckily for the Good Neighbor Policy, he cannot.

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than in the preceding two millennia—poor Malthus, never has a brilliantly original theorist been so speedily refuted by history! And it subjected them to a uniform discipline whose only precedent was the "slave socialism" of Egypt. But the Egypt of the Pharaohs produced no Masscult any more than did the great Oriental empires or the late Rome of the proletarian rabble, because the masses were passive, inert, submerged far below the level of political or cultural power. It was not until the end of the 18th century in Europe that the majority of people began to play an active part in either history or culture.

Up to then, there was only High Culture and Folk Art. To some extent, Masscult is a continuation of Folk Art, but the differences are more striking than the similarities. Folk Art grew mainly from below, an autochthonous product shaped by the people to fit their own needs, even though it often took its cue from High Culture. Masscult comes from above. It is fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen. They try this and try that and if something clicks at the box-office, they try to cash in with similar products, like consumer-researchers with a new cereal, or like a Pavlovian biologist who has hit on a reflex he thinks can be conditioned. It is one thing to satisfy popular tastes, as Robert Burns' poetry did, and quite another to exploit them, as Hollywood does. Folk Art was the people's own institution, their private little kitchen-garden walled off from the great formal park of their masters.[5] But Masscult breaks down the wall, integrating the masses into a debased form of High Culture and

5 And if it was often influenced by High Culture, it did change the forms and themes into its own style. The only major form of Folk Art that still persists in this country is jazz, and the difference between Folk Art and Masscult may be most readily perceived by comparing the kind of thing heard at the annual Newport Jazz Festivals to Rock 'n Roll. The former is musically interesting and emotionally real; the latter is—not. The amazing survival of jazz despite the exploitative onslaughts of half a century of commercial entrepreneurs is, in my opinion, due to its folk quality. And as the noble and the peasant understood each other better than either understood the bourgeois, so it seems significant that jazz is the only art form that appeals to both the intelligentsia and the common people. As for the others, let them listen to *South Pacific*.

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thus becoming an instrument of domination. If one had no other data to go on, Masscult would expose capitalism as a class society rather than the harmonious commonwealth that, in presidential years, both parties tell us it is.

The same goes even more strongly for the Soviet Union, like most statements about the evils of American capitalism. Its Masscult is both worse and more pervasive than ours, a fact which is often not recognized because in form Soviet Masscult is just the opposite, aiming at propaganda and pedagogy rather than distraction. But like ours, it is imposed from above and it exploits rather than satisfies the needs of the masses—though, of course, for political rather than commercial reasons. Its quality is even lower. Our Supreme Court building is tasteless and pompous but not to the lunatic degree of most Soviet architecture; post-1930 Soviet films, with a few exceptions, are far duller and cruder than our own; the primitive level of *serious* Soviet periodicals devoted to matters of art or philosophy has to be read to be believed, and as for the popular press, it is as if Hearst or Colonel McCormick ran every periodical in America. Furthermore, while here individuals can simply turn their back on Masscult and do their own work, there no such escape is possible; the official cultural bodies control all outlets and a *Dr. Zhivago* must be smuggled out for foreign publication.

V

Masscult first made its appearance in eighteenth century England, where also, significantly, the industrial revolution was just beginning. The important change was the replacement of the individual patron by the market. The process had begun in Elizabethan times, when journalists like Nashe and Greene made a hard living from the popular sale of their pamphlets and when the theater depended partly on subsidies from noble patrons and partly on paid admissions. But Masscult's first sizable body of professionals were the hacks of Grub Street, ready to turn their hand to ballads, novels, history, encyclopedias, philosophy, re-

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portage or anything else the publishers thought might go. Dr. Johnson was one of them in his impoverished youth, and his letter to Lord Chesterfield (who had neglected Johnson while the dictionary was being compiled and who now tried to wangle a dedication) was the consummate expression of the change.

Seven years, my lord, have now passed since I waited in your outward rooms or was repulsed from your door; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties, of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it at last to the verge of publication, without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favor. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a patron before . . .

Is not a patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached ground encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labors, had it been early had been kind. But it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it.

I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron which Providence has enabled me to do for myself . . . For I have long been wakened from that dream of hope in which I once boasted myself with such exultation, my lord—

Your lordship's most humble, most obedient servant,
SAM. JOHNSON

This Declaration of Independence, written eleven years before our own, made a similar point: Sam. Johnson found the noble lord as superfluous to his existence as the American colonists did His Britannic Majesty.

It must be added that, however defective as a patron, Lord Chesterfield reacted in the grand manner. Far from crushing him, the muted thunders of Johnson's letter seem to have delighted him as a connoisseur. When the bookseller Dodsley called

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on him soon afterward, he found the letter open on a table for his lordship's visitors to enjoy. "He read it to me," Dodsley writes, "said 'this man has great power,' pointed out the severest passages, and observed how well they were expressed." Boswell thought Chesterfield's reaction "glossy duplicity," but there was more to it than that. The old order went out on a high note of aristocratic taste, very different from the new cultural forces that were superseding it.

For the eighteenth century in British letters began with optimism and ended with doubt and even despair; and both were reactions to the same phenomenon: the enormous increase in the audience. "From 1700 to 1800 the reading public expanded from one which had included mainly the aristocracy, clerics and scholars to one which also included clerks, artisans, laborers and farmers . . . The annual publication of new books quadrupled."[6] At first almost every one, with the notable exceptions of Pope and Swift, assumed this growth was simply A Good Thing—the Victorians made the same mistake about popular education. The new readers would be elevated by contact with good literature and the result would be a larger but not a qualitatively different public. The initial success of Addison's and Steele's *The Spectator* was encouraging. Published as a daily in 1711-1712, it quickly reached 3,000 circulation, about what some of our most respected Little Magazines have achieved in a population many times larger. (A real circulation-manager

6 For this quote and for most of the material in this and the next paragraph, I am indebted to one of Leo Lowenthal's several interesting studies in Masscult, "The Debate over Art and Popular Culture in 18th Century England" (written in collaboration with Marjorie Fiske), which appears in a volume unpromisingly titled *Common Frontiers of the Social Sciences* (Free Press, 1951). Q. D. Leavis, in her *Fiction and the Reading Public* (Chatto & Windus, 1932), still the best book on the deterioration of standards as a result of the rise of the mass public, puts the turning point about a century later. The precise dating of a great historical change like this is, of course, a matter of opinion. I think Mrs. Leavis' book exaggerates the solid merits of the pre-1830 popular novels and journalism. But we can (and do) all agree on the main point—the effects of the mass market on literature.

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type, Addison estimated that, what with multiple readership in the coffee houses, the total coverage was close to 60,000.)

But by the middle of the century, a similar magazine, Johnson's *The Rambler,* never got above 500 and was abandoned as a failure. The new public, it would seem, had read *The Spectator* because there was nothing worse to read. The Grub Street publishers hastened to fill the gap, Gresham's Law began to work, and the bad drove the good out of circulation (though for the opposite reason from the law's original application, for in currency people circulate the bad because they prefer the good and therefore hang on to it, while in books they circulate the bad because they like it better than the good). By 1790, a bookseller named Lackington was lyrical about the change:

> The poorer sort of farmers, and even the poor country people in general, who before that period spent their winter evenings in relating stories of witches, ghosts, hobgoblins, etc., now shorten the winter nights by hearing their sons and daughters read tales, romances, etc., and on entering their houses you may see *Tom Jones, Roderick Random* and other entertaining books stuck up in their bacon racks . . . In short, all ranks and degrees now READ.

Lyrical, charming, democratically heartening, but few of the books in the bacon racks were on the level of *Tom Jones* and perhaps the farmers should have stuck to their witches and hobgoblins. Certainly the effect on literary taste was alarming. By the end of the century, even such successful writers for the new public as Johnson, Goldsmith and Fielding were showing concern as the flood of trash steadily rose.

The mass audience was taking shape and a corresponding shift in literary criticism was beginning, away from objective standards and toward a new subjective approach in which the question was not how good the work is but how popular it will be. Not that the creator is ever independent of his time and place; the demands of the audience have always largely determined his work. But before 1750, these demands were them-

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selves disciplined by certain standards of excellence which were accepted by both the limited public of informed amateurs and the artists who performed for them. By now in this country, the demands of the audience, which has changed from a small body of connoisseurs into a large body of ignoramuses, have become the chief criteria of success. Only the Little Magazines worry about standards. The commercial press, including *The Saturday Review* and *The New York Times Book Review,* consider books as commodities, rating them according to audience-response. The newspaper movie columns are extreme examples. There, the humble effort of the "critic"—and indeed one would have to put even "reviewer" in quotes—is merely to tell his readers which films they, not he, like.

With the prescience of a snob of genius, Alexander Pope wrote *The Dunciad* a half-century before the tide of vulgarization had begun to gather full force. Grub Street (read: Madison Avenue or perhaps Sunset Boulevard) was its target and its anti-heroes were Theobald and Cibber, the former a lawyer who pretended to scholarship and the latter an actor whose vanity led him to write serious books. These dunces, who were getting away with their impostures, symbolized the confusion in the world of letters that the expansion of the audience had introduced. Two centuries later, when the goddess of Dullness has so extended her realm that one takes it for granted that most current productions will be of her kingdom, one is startled by Pope's vindictive passion, as in the ending:

She comes! She comes! the sable throne behold
Of night primeval and of chaos old!
Before her, fancy's gilded clouds decay
And all its varying rainbows die away.
Wit shoots in vain its momentary fires,
The meteor drops and in a flash expires.

* * *

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Thus at her felt approach and secret might,
Art after art goes out, and all is night.

* * *

Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos, is restored;
Light dies before thy uncreating word!
Thy hand, great anarch, lets the curtain fall
And universal darkness buries all.

This is magnificent but exaggerated. With the best will in the world, we have not been able to ring down the curtain; the darkness is still far from universal. Man's nature is tough and full of unexpected quirks, and there are still many pockets of resistance. But in some ways history has surpassed Pope's worst imaginings. With the French Revolution, the masses for the first time made their entrance onto the political stage, and it was not long before they also began to occupy a central position in culture. Grub Street was no longer peripheral and the traditional kind of authorship became more and more literally eccentric—out of the center—until by the end of the nineteenth century, the movement from which most of the enduring work of our time has come, had separated itself from the market and was in systematic opposition to it.

This movement, was, of course, the "avant-garde" whose precursors were Stendhal and Baudelaire and the impressionist painters, whose pioneers included Rimbaud, Whitman, Ibsen, Cezanne, Wagner, and whose classic masters were figures like Stravinsky, Picasso, Joyce, Eliot, and Frank Lloyd Wright. Perhaps "movement" is too precise a term; the avant-gardists were linked by no esthetic doctrine, not even by a consciousness that they *were* avant-garde (as, Rimbaud and Whitman). What they had in common was that they turned their backs on the marketplace, preferring to work for a small audience that sympathized with their experiments because it was sophisticated enough to understand them. By an act of will dictated by necessity (the necessity of survival as a creator, as against a

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technician) each of them rejected the historical drift of post-1800 Western culture and recreated the old, traditional situation in which the artist communicated with his peers rather than talked down to his inferiors. Later on, they became famous and those who survived even got rich—the avant-garde is one of the great success-stories of this century—but their creative work was done in a very different atmosphere. In the second part of this article, I shall deal at length with this phenomenon, especially the assumption of the avant-garde into the Midcult heavens. Where are the avant-gardists of yesteryear? Doing very nicely, thanks.

VI

The two great early best-sellers in Grub Street's triumph were Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott. Both exploited romanticism, a new creed whose emphasis on subjective feeling as against traditional form was suitable to the democratization of taste that was taking place. But they differed interestingly. Each represented an aspect of Masscult, Scott the production line, Byron the emphasis on the artist himself. Antithetical but also complementary: the more literature became a branch of industry, the more the craving for the other extreme—individuality. Or rather, a somewhat coarser commodity, Personality.

It is hard for us to understand the effect of Scott's novels on his contemporaries. They were commonly compared to Shakespeare, for their variety and their broad human sympathy. "A great mind unequalled anywhere who naturally produces the most extraordinary effects upon the whole world of readers," was Goethe's judgment. But Croce, in his *European Literature in the Nineteenth Century,* places his finger on the radical, the fatal defect of the Waverley novels: "There are too many of them." He has much also to say about the monotony of Scott's style and the "mechanical method" with which he constructed his characters. But quantity is the point. "[He was] an industrial producer, intent upon supplying the market with objects for

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which the demand was as keen as the want was legitimate . . . Is it not healthy to demand images of virtue, of courage, of generous feelings, and . . . to seek also to obtain instruction as to historical customs and events? Scott had the genius to carry out the commercial enterprise which supplied this want . . . One has the impression, when reading his biography, that one is reading about a hero of industry." And indeed the chief interest is his enormous productivity, his big earnings, his baronial style of life, his heroic struggle to pay off his creditors after bankruptcy. "Nothing is said as to his inner life, his loves, his religion, his ideas; less than nothing about his spiritual struggles and development," Croce continues. Any more than such topics would occur to the biographers of Ford, Carnegie, Rockefeller or the present head of the U.S. Steel Corp.

For one has the impression, in reading even the greatest of the nineteenth century popular novelists, that the demands of the market pushed them too hard. So Dickens, so Balzac, so Mark Twain. Today the pressure for production comes under the head of physics rather than of esthetics. In the 1955-1956 season, a long-forgotten TV program called "Matinee" put on five original one-hour plays a week every week, or 260 a year; it took 100 writers, 20 directors and 4,000 actors to keep these Molochian fires stoked. The rate at which TV uses up comic talent has been described by Fred Allen, a notable victim; one has merely to see a TV comedy show to realize how tragically right he was. A big publishing house like Doubleday must have hundreds of titles a year to keep its presses busy; the overhead goes on, the more books produced the cheaper to produce each one, and the fear that wakes publishers in the night is that the presses may for a moment stop. Such birth-control as there is for some reason is exercised at the expense of original and distinguished manuscripts. Anything that is sufficiently banal is sure of a kinder hearing, on the assumption that a bad book *may* sell whereas a good one definitely *won't*. The vast amount of unprofitable junk the publishers issue every year might be expected

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to cause some misgivings about this notion—if mere banality were a guarantee of success, every Hollywood movie would make money—but somehow the lesson is never learned. Perhaps one should investigate the publisher's own tastes.[7]

Byron was as romantic and almost as industrious as Scott but otherwise there were few similarities. His life was as disorderly as Scott's was respectable, his personality as rebellious as Scott's was conventional. It was this personality that won him his mass following: he was the first bohemian, the first avant-gardist, the first beatnik. If Scott was the artist as entrepreneur, Byron was the artist as rebel, and there was less difference between these extremes, from the standpoint of Masscult, than one might have thought. For Byron was a formidable competitor. Scott began as a romantic poet, but when Byron began to publish, Scott made a strategic retreat to prose and began to write the Waverley novels. It was a shrewd decision. *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake,* while accomplished exercises in the romantic-historical genre, quite lacked the personal note; readers could hardly identify with Roderick Dhu, while Childe Harold and Manfred were not only identifiable but also seemed to express their author's even more identifiable personality.

Byron's reputation was different from that of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden and Pope because it was based on the man—or what the public conceived to be the man—rather than on his work. His poems were taken not as artistic objects in themselves but as expressions of their creator's personality. Similarly, Clark Gable acts himself rather than any specific role; his classical opposite number is the Protean Laurence

7 Another possibility is that every editor and publisher is daily buried under such an avalanche of nonsense that he loses his bearings. As any one who has ever taught a course in "creative writing" knows, it is a democratic right of every freeborn American to be a "writer." The obliteration of standards in the Masscult world is nowhere shown more clearly than in this innocent conviction. In the year 1956, for example, *The Ladies Home Journal* received 21,822 unsolicited manuscripts, of which it accepted 16. And even the 16 lucky hits might not be considered worth the ink and paper by some critics.

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Olivier, who can actually impersonate, with style and passion, all kinds of other people, from Henry V to the seedy song-and-dance man of *The Entertainer*. Of course it wasn't really Byron himself but a contrived *persona* which fitted into the contemporary public's idea of a poet. Goethe was as obtuse on Byron as he was on Scott; he praised him as a great poet but added the well-known proviso: "When he thinks, he is a child." The reverse was the truth: as a "great poet" Byron was banal—who reads his "serious" poetry now?—but when he thought, he was not at all childish; that is, when he (one senses with some relief) dropped the pretense of romantic passion and let his realistic 18th-century temperament play around, as in his diaries and letters and in *Beppo* and *Don Juan*. There were two Byrons, the public swashbuckler of *The Corsair* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and the private mocker of the same romantic attitudes, and this split between the two was to become congenital. One thinks of Mark Twain, with his public pose as the genial homespun philosopher and his private hell of nihilist despair.

VII

Or of John Barrymore, whose profile and sexual-romantic prowess were as famous as Byron's and whose Masscult *persona* bound him to the wheel of endless portrayals of The Great Lover and repressed his real talents, which were a beautiful diction and a distinguished stage presence (as in his *Hamlet*), sensitivity as an actor (as in the movie of *A Bill of Divorcement*), and a gift for light comedy curiously analogous to Byron's flair for burlesque. The latter glittered in a few scenes of sardonic, graceful mugging in such routine movie farces as *The Man from Blankley's* and *Twentieth Century*.

Since in a mass society people are related not to each other but to some abstract organizing principle, they are often in a state of exhaustion, for this lack of contact is unnatural. So Masscult attempts to provide distraction for the tired business man—or the tired proletarian. This kind of art is necessarily at

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a distance from the individual since it is specifically designed to affect not what differentiates him from everybody else—that is what is of liveliest interest to *him*—but rather to work on the reflexes he shares with everybody else. So he is at a distance.

But people feel a need to be related to other people. The simplest way of bridging this distance, or rather of pretending to bridge it, is by emphasizing the personality of the artist; the individual buried in the mass audience can relate himself to the individual in the artist, since they are, after all, both persons. So while Masscult is in one sense extremely impersonal, in another it is extremely personal. The artist is thus charismatic and his works become the expression of this charisma rather than, as in the past, objective creations to be judged in and by themselves.

In his alcoholic last years, John Barrymore gave an extreme illustration of this principle.

> Six months ago [runs a story in *Time* of November 6, 1939] a ham show opened in Chicago. Last week it was still running there. It had become a civic institution. It had played to 150,000 people and grossed over $250,000. The theatre was sold out three weeks in advance . . .
>
> The answer was . . . that the leading man [was] the great John Barrymore—sometimes ill, sometimes tight, but always a trouper . . . "Yep," says the doorman, "he arrives every night, dead or alive." . . . He says anything that comes into his head. When he is well wound up, *My Dear Children* may bumble on till after midnight. Once a fire engine sounded in the street. Sang out Barrymore: "I hope they get to the fire in time." Once he saw Ned Sparks in the audience. Walking to the footlights, Barrymore shouted: "There's that old bastard Ned Sparks." Once he couldn't hear the prompter in the wings, yelled: "Give those cues louder!" [etc.] Once, unable to stand up, he played the whole show sitting down. Another time, when he couldn't even issue from the dressing room to stage, he said: "Get me a wheel chair—I'll play Lionel."
>
> Audiences eat it up. They complain to the box office only on those rare occasions when Barrymore plays his part straight.

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Barrymore was not, by this time, exploiting his romantic personality; he was not even burlesquing it, since the *ad libs*—except for the crack about Lionel—were not funny. He was living on his capital, selling his gilt-edge bonds (his romantic reputation) and when he had liquidated them all (when the public began to think of him not as "the great John Barrymore" of the past but as the drunken cut-up of the present) he would have been bankrupt. Luckily, he died before that happened.

For their part, the mass public liked him in this final stage of disintegration precisely because it showed them he was no better than they were, in fact he was a good deal worse. In the "genius" act of the Masscult period, there is a strange ambivalence. The masses put an absurdly high value on the personal genius, the charisma, of the performer, but it also demands a secret rebate: he must play the game—*their* game—must distort his personality to suit their taste. Byron did it when he wore an open collar and made sure that his hyacinthine locks were properly disordered. Robert Frost did it when he called a press conference, not so long ago, on moving into his office at the Library of Congress as Consultant on Poetry, and told the assembled reporters that his job might be called "Poet in Waiting" and further confided that he wanted some good paintings to hang in his office: "I want to get the place out of the small-potatoes class." Even the staid *New York Times* was stimulated to headline its story: POET IN WAITING BIDS FOR A RATING. That Frost is a fine poet isn't relevant here; he is also a natural showman, and the relevant question is why our most distinguished poet feels it desirable to indulge this minor talent, clowning around like another Carl Sandburg. Bernard Shaw is the most interesting case of all, combining arrogance and subservience in the most dazzling way, as in the thousands of postcards he wrote to his admirers explaining why he couldn't possibly be bothered to reply.

In Masscult (and in its bastard, Midcult) everything becomes a commodity, to be mined for $$$$, used for something

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it is not, from Davy Crockett to Picasso. Once a writer becomes a Name, that is, once he writes a book that for good or bad reasons catches on, the Masscult (or Midcult) mechanism begins to "build him up," to package him into something that can be sold in identical units in quantity. He can coast along the rest of his life on momentum; publishers will pay him big advances just to get his Name on their list; his charisma becomes such that people will pay him $250 up to address them (really just to *see* him); editors will reward him handsomely for articles on subjects he knows nothing about. Artists and writers have always had a tendency to repeat themselves, but Masscult (and Midcult) make it highly profitable to do so and in fact penalize those who don't. Some years ago, I'm told, a leading abstract artist complained to a friend that he was tired of the genre that had made him famous and wanted to try something else; but his gallery insisted such a shift would be commercially disastrous and, since he had children to send through college, he felt obliged to comply. Or compare the careers of James T. Farrell and Norman Mailer. The former made a reputation with the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy in the early 'thirties and his many books since then have gone on repeating the mixture as before; although his later books have won small critical esteem, he is still considered a major American writer and still gathers all the perquisites and emoluments thereof; Farrell is a standard and marketable commodity, like Jello. Although Mailer is still a Name, with plenty of p. and e., he has crossed up his public and his publishers by refusing to repeat himself. His reputation was made with his first novel, *The Naked and the Dead,* in 1948, but he has insisted on developing, or at least changing, since then, and his three subsequent books have little in common, in either style or content, with his first great success. From the Masscult (or Midcult) point of view, he has jeopardized a sound investment in order to gratify his personal interests. "When a writer gets hold of a sure thing," Somerset Maugham, who should know, once observed, "you may expect him to hang

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on to it for a lifetime, like a dog worrying a bone." This is not at all to imply that James T. Farrell is deliberately hanging on to his bone for profit or prestige, or that Norman Mailer changes his bones for idealistic reasons. The truth probably is that the former really enjoys mumbling the same old bone while the latter, perhaps because he is more volatile and talented, has wanted to try something new. But the result is that Farrell has got a lot of mileage out of very little gas, while Mailer is still a real problem to his publishers.

VIII

Let us, finally, consider Masscult first from the standpoint of consumption and then from that of production.

As a marketable commodity, Masscult has two great advantages over High Culture. One has already been considered: the post-1750 public, lacking the taste and knowledge of the old patron class, is not only satisfied with shoddy mass-produced goods but in general feels more at home with them (though on unpredictable occasions, they will respond to the real thing, as with Dickens' novels and the movies of Chaplin and Griffiths). This is because such goods are standardized and so are easier to consume since one knows what's coming next—imagine a Western in which the hero loses the climactic gun fight or an office romance in which the mousy stenographer loses out to the predatory blonde. But standardization has a subtler aspect, which might be called The Built-In Reaction. As Clement Greenberg noted in "Avantgarde and *Kitsch*" many years ago in this magazine, the special esthetic quality of *kitsch*—a term which includes both Masscult and Midcult—is that it "predigests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a shortcut to the pleasures of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in the genuine art" because it includes the spectator's reactions in the work itself instead of forcing him to make his own responses. That standby of provincial weddings, *I Love You Truly,* is far more "romantic" than the most beauti-

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ful of Schubert's songs because its wallowing, yearning tremolos and glissandos make it clear to the most unmusical listener that something very tender indeed is going on. It does his feeling for him; or, as T. W. Adorno has observed of popular music, "The composition hears for the listener." Thus Liberace is a much more "musical" pianist than Serkin, whose piano is not adorned with antique candelabra and whose stance at it is as businesslike as Liberace's is "artistic." So, too, our Collegiate Gothic, which may be seen in its most resolutely picturesque (and expensive) phase at Yale, is more relentlessly Gothic than Chartres, whose builders didn't even know they *were* Gothic and so missed many chances for quaint effects.[8] And so, too, Boca Raton, the millionaires' suburb that Addison Mizener designed in Palm Beach during the Great Bull Market of the 'twenties, is so aggressively Spanish Mission that a former American ambassador to Spain is said to have murmured in awe, "It's more Spanish than anything I ever saw in Madrid." The same Law of the Built-In-Reaction also insures that a smoothly airbrushed pin-up girl by Petty is more "sexy" than a real naked woman, the emphasis of breasts and thighs corresponding to the pornographically exaggerated Gothic details of Harkness. More *sexy* but not more *sexual,* the relation between the terms being similar to that of *sentimentality* to *sentiment* or *modernistic* to *modern,* or *art* to *arty.*

The production of Masscult is a subtler business than one might think. We have already seen in the case of Poe that a serious writer will produce art even when he is trying to function

8 When I lived in Harkness Memorial Quadrangle some thirty years ago, I noticed a number of cracks in the tiny-paned windows of my room that had been patched with picturesquely wavy strips of lead. Since the place had just been built, I thought this peculiar. Later I found that after the windows had been installed, a special gang of artisans had visited them; one craftsman had delicately cracked every tenth or twentieth pane with a little hammer and another had then repaired the cracks. In a few days, the windows of Harkness had gone through an evolution that in backward places like Oxford had taken centuries. I wonder what they do in Harkness when a window is broken by accident.

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as a hack, simply because he cannot help putting himself into his work. The unhappy hero of James' story, "The Next Time," tried again and again to prostitute his talents and write a best-seller to support his family, but each time he created another unprofitable masterpiece; with the best will in the world, he was simply unable to achieve a low enough standard. The reverse is also true: a hack will turn out hack stuff even when he tries to be serious. Most of these examples will come later under Midcult, but Masscult also has its little tragedies. When I was in Hollywood recently, I was told by one of the most intelligent younger directors, Stanley Kubrick: "The reason movies are often so bad out here isn't because the people who make them are cynical money hacks. Most of them are doing the very best they can; they really want to make good movies. The trouble is with their heads, not their hearts." This was borne out by the film I was there to write about, a mawkish travesty of Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts* that was written and produced by Dore Schary with the noblest intentions.

There seem to be two main conditions for the successful production of *kitsch*. One is that the producer must believe in what he is doing. A good example is Norman Rockwell, who since 1916 has painted over three hundred covers for *The Saturday Evening Post*. When a fellow-illustrator remarked that their craft was just a way to make a living—"You do your job, you get your check, and nobody thinks it's art"—Rockwell was horrified. "Oh no no no. How can you say that? No man with a conscience can just bat out illustrations. He's got to put all of his talent, all of his feelings into them." Having just seen a most interesting exhibition of Rockwell's techniques at a local bank, I think he was telling the truth. He makes dozens of careful, highly competent pencil sketches, plus oil renderings of crucial details, for just one *Post* cover; if taking thought could add a cubit to an artist's stature, Norman Rockwell would be a giant. The trouble is that the final result of all this painstaking craftsmanship is just . . . a *Post* cover, as slick

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and cliché in execution as in content. "There's this magazine cover," says the comedian Mort Sahl, "and it shows this kid getting his first haircut you know and a dog is licking his hand and his mother is crying and it's Saturday night in the old home town and people are dancing outside in the streets and the Liberty Bell is ringing and, uh, did I miss anything?" But Rockwell is sincere, so much so that he constantly wonders whether he is living up to his talents. In the 'twenties, according to a profile in the *Post,* he went through a crisis as comic as it was pathetic:

> Professional friends, dabbling in modernism, told him he ought to learn something about dynamic symmetry, and their arguments worried him . . . Rockwell packed up and went to Paris. He attended lectures and bought Picassos to hang in his studio for inspiration. On his return he set about applying what he had learned to *Post* covers. When editor George Horace Lorimer examined the first new Rockwell offerings, he laid them aside and gave the artist a paternal lecture on the value of being one's self, pointing out in passing that it was conceivably better to have one's work displayed on the *Post's* covers than embalmed in art museums. Chastened, Rockwell agreed and went back to being himself. He now refers to his temporary aberration as "my James-Joyce-Gertrude-Stein period."

Lorimer's missionary work was completed by a Stanford girl Rockwell married a few years later, a nice sensible young bride who in good American fashion "helped get him back on the beam and keep him there." In this not exactly Herculean task, she appears to have succeeded. He was positively defiant some twelve years ago when he was being interviewed for a *New Yorker* profile:

> My creed is that painting pictures of any kind is a definite form of expression and that illustration is the principal pictorial form of conveying ideas and telling funny stories. The critics say that any proper picture should be primarily a series of technical problems of light, shadow, proportion, color and voids. I say that if

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you can tell a story in a picture and if a reasonable number of people like your work, it is art. Maybe it isn't the highest form of art, but it's art nevertheless and it's what I love to do. I feel that I am doing something when I paint a picture that appeals to most people. This is a democracy, isn't it?

To which last the reply is, in terms of Rockwell's covers, "Yep, sure is." Yet, despite this credo, which every popular artist should have printed in red and black and hung over his draw-ing-board alongside Kipling's *If,* Rockwell still keeps worrying. He had another crisis a couple of years ago, at sixty-five, when he again wondered what he might have done "if I hadn't gone commercial" and again began to talk of Picasso as "the greatest"; he took a year off to do some Serious painting (except for a mere six *Post* covers), with results unknown to me. He also wrote his autobiography. It is being serialized in the *Post.*

The other condition for success in Masscult is that the writer, artist, editor, director or entertainer must have a good deal of the mass-man in himself, as was the case with Zane Grey, Howard Chandler Christy, Mr. Lorimer of the *Post,* Cecil B. DeMille, and Elvis Presley. This is closely related to sincerity —how can he take his work seriously if he doesn't have this instinctive, this built-in vulgar touch? Like Rockwell, he may know that art is good and honorable and worthy of respect, and he may pay tribute to it. But knowing it is one thing and feeling it is another. A journalistic entrepreneur like Henry Luce —by no means the worst—has the same kind of idle curiosity about the Facts and the same kind of gee-whiz excitement about rather elementary ideas (see *Life* editorials passim) as his millions of readers have. When I worked for him on *Fortune* in the early 'thirties, I was struck by three qualities he had as an editor: his shrewdness as to what was and what was not "a story," his high dedication to his task, and his limited cultural background despite, or perhaps because of, his having attended

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Yale College. All three are closely interrelated in his success: a more sophisticated editor would have gotten out of step with his millions of readers, a less idealistic one would have lacked the moral oomph to attract them, and he knew a "story" when he saw one because what interested them interested him.[9]

9 An episode in my six years at *Fortune* is to the point here. In 1931-1932 I was active on a literary magazine (along with two friends who in 1938 were to become, with me, editors of *Partisan Review*: F. W. Dupee and George L. K. Morris) which had a circulation of about 600. Thinking Luce would be pleased, and interested, by this evidence of cultural enterprise on the part of one of his writers, I sent him up an issue of *The Miscellany,* as it was dismally called. His reaction was that I had betrayed Time, Inc. "But Henry," I said—in those days, long before *Sports Illustrated* or even *Life,* manners were still pastorally simple at Time, Inc., and Luce was merely *primus inter pares*—"But Henry, you can't expect *Fortune* to be my only interest. I give it a good day's work from nine to five, that's what you pay me for, and it's my business what I do in my spare time." This argument affected Luce much as his cynical colleague's did Norman Rockwell. With his usual earnestness—he was and I'm sure is a decent and honorable man, not at all the ogre the liberal press portrays—Luce expounded quite a different philosophy: *Fortune* was not just a job, it was a vocation worthy of a man's whole effort, and pay and time-schedules weren't the point at all. "Why, the very name *Fortune* was thought up by so-and-so [one of my fellow editors] late one night on the West Side subway between the 72nd and the 79th street stations [Luce was a *Time*man always]. This is a twenty-four-hour profession, you never know when you may get an idea for us, and if you're all the time thinking about some damn little magazine . . ." "But Henry . . ." It was an impasse, since I looked on *Fortune* as a means and he as an end, nor had it been resolved when I left the magazine years later.

(The second part of this article will appear in the next issue)

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Vladimir Dudintsev

A NEW YEAR'S FABLE*

I live in a fantastic world, a fabulous land, a city of my imagination. There wondrous things befall people, and I have had my share of these adventures. I shall tell you something about them, profiting by the fact that on New Year's Eve people are inclined to listen to all sorts of fantasies.

I shall speak of time and the tricks it plays on us. Time, after all, is boundless and ubiquitously active. In a world of fable a watch can always be set by Moscow time. This is why I am taking the risk of setting out on my story—perhaps some curious person will be found who will become interested in certain passages of my fantasy as they touch on the reality of his life.

A mysterious bird—an owl—came flying into our city. It made a few people happier by visiting them. The first of these was my immediate chief, the Head of the Laboratory for Solar Research, where I work. The second turned out to be a doctor, a neuro-pathologist and my old school friend. For the

* This new work by the author of *Not By Bread Alone,* a novel that became famous for its outspoken criticism of Soviet bureaucracy, seems to us a story of unusual interest. It represents a break with the official doctrine of socialist realism, and is in other ways obviously unorthodox in its political implications, although these are not simple.

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THE EDITORS

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third the owl selected me. It was a remarkable bird, that. It would not be a bad idea to study its habits and to include its portrait in books of ornithology.

By that time I had already published several scientific works about certain aspects of solar light. I had a degree, acted as consultant to several commissions, and was in a hurry to make a solid reputation for myself. Modeling my behavior on that of our venerable scientists, I learned, like them, to hold my head high; in the same way, I deliberately weighed every problem presented to me and, like them, raising an eyebrow, I gave my precious, well-pondered answer in a sing-song voice. One other trait: I grew accustomed to taking care of my expensive overcoat. We had closets in our offices and, imitating the older scientists, I hung in my closet a wooden coat hanger with my initials on it.

As a person endowed with a few modest accomplishments, I trained myself, on the advice of a certain academician, to jot down any ideas that unexpectedly entered my head. As we all know, our most valuable ideas are not those we painfully labor over at a desk but rather those that descend upon us like a gust of wind, most often when we are strolling in the street. I would jot down these ideas and then forget all about them. But our stove-woman was well aware that she could always find in the drawers of my desk magic scraps of paper which flared like gunpowder. She got into the habit of emptying my desk and using these scraps to kindle all the stoves in the laboratory.

Behind my solid exterior there lurked a naive child (it also lurked within my chief, who had his doctorate). This chubby-cheeked child would sometimes emerge into the open, especially during those evening hours when we, the unmarried men, would settle down in our quarters in front of the TV set and goggle-eyed, immobilized, as if preserved in alcohol, stare for hours at the rapidly flashing legs of football players on the bluish screen.

As you can see, I am not sparing myself here at all. Quite

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consciously I am exposing, and shall continue to expose, many aspects of my character for your judgment, and I myself shall be the strictest judge. For some time past my eyes seem to have been opened—in particular, ever since that day when the owl in person paid me the first visit. The owl opened my eyes. I am very grateful to it.

For example, I saw in an entirely new light my long disputation with a certain Mr. S., a corresponding member of a certain provincial Academy of Sciences. Five years ago he had, in an article, called my well-known published work "the fruit of idle fancies." I was obliged to answer him. In a subsequent article I refuted, as if in passing, S.'s fundamental premises and threw in very appropriately, I believe, the following sentence: "This is precisely what the doctoral candidate S. has attempted unsuccessfully to prove." (I was perfectly well aware that, even though he was a corresponding member of the Academy, the degree he held was the same as mine—that of a doctoral candidate.) S. immediately responded to my attack by publishing a brochure in which, just as casually, he affirmed that I was forcing the results of my experiments into the framework of a theory, and he put quotation marks round the word "theory." Soon after, I printed a long article about my new observations on the sun, confirming the theory he had put in quotation marks and playing havoc with S.'s statistics. "The torpedo made a direct hit," was the general opinion of my colleagues. In the article I did not mention S. by name — I knew that my enemy could not withstand the second torpedo. I simply referred to "certain authors." But the battleship stood the shock and answered back. . . .

And so forth. This war, which lasted for five years, had shaken my nervous system to the roots, and not mine alone!

But let us get down to business. One morning we had all gathered in our laboratory, hung up our overcoats on our hangers and, before proceeding with our research, stopped for our usual morning chat. Our senior and most respected chief,

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the Doctor of Sciences, was the first to start the ball rolling. In his spare time he was a student of antiquity and a collector of stone axes, ancient coins and old books; and, in my opinion, the whole significance of his peaceful life lay in this hobby rather than in our work.

"A curious thing!" he exclaimed, inviting us to listen. "Not long ago, while deciphering an inscription on a stone slab, I discovered the following image."

He showed us a white sheet of paper on which an owl with large ears had been drawn in ink.

"I also succeeded in deciphering the inscription," the chief announced proudly. "There was a name there and words that read: 'And his age was nine hundred.' "

"Y-yes . . ." one of my other colleagues, who loved to dress smartly and to play practical jokes, said thoughtfully. "Four hundred would be enough for me . . . ."

"Why do you need it?" a dry, broad-shouldered, elderly man, who usually was silent, asked abruptly. He was sitting near me and differed from all of us by his marked carelessness in dress, his taciturnity and his incredible capacity for work. "You have no need for these four hundred years," he added. "You're in no hurry anyhow."

"I'd like you to note!" the chief exclaimed, raising his voice to make it clear that he had been interrupted, "I'd like you to note that owls of this type have been discovered at different times in various countries. In one of the deserts there stands a gigantic owl of granite. But this is the first such find in our locality. If I may boast a little," and hereupon the chief smiled broadly, "both this owl and this inscription are my personal discovery. I excavated the slab in my own garden."

We congratulated the lucky man, examined the owl once again, and then dispersed to our places of work.

"I'll make it my business to discover the meaning of this image," the chief said. "Then I shall publish the findings."

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"Perhaps this hieroglyphic denotes a man who best knew how to utilize his time," I ventured to suggest.

"Possibly. But that would have to be verified."

"But an age-span of nine hundred years!" I could not restrain myself from exclaiming. "Was such longevity ever possible?"

"Everything is possible!" snapped my broad-shouldered, forever concentrating neighbor, without stopping his work.

"What do you mean?" the chief politely inquired.

"Time is an enigma," he replied even more enigmatically.

"Yes, time is an enigma," the chief said, echoing this interesting idea. He took the hour-glass from the wall, turned it upside down and set it before him on his desk. "It's running!" he commented, watching the sand. "And look at the result. Every instant of our life may be compared to a minute grain of sand, to an infinitely tiny speck . . . one that vanishes instantly. . . ."

I suddenly felt a spasm of pain in my chest. I had once experienced several months of unexpected and extraordinary love, and now that I looked back with pain upon those months, they emerged into one single instant, into a mere grain of sand dropping to the bottom of the hour-glass. Not a trace remained in my hands. It was as though nothing had even been! I sighed. If I could only turn the hour-glass again!

"Excuse me, chief," our personnel manager said, interrupting my reflections. "Where does your theory—if I may call it that—lead us: if time is a mere speck, then we have no heroic past? No sunny future?"

He was fond of loudly posing very blunt questions as if implicating a man in some horrible crime.

"My apologies if I said something amiss," our peace-loving chief replied. "But, in my view, I did not have time to formulate any theory. It's all a joke, a fantasy . . . ."

"A strange fantasy that. After all, we have a certain framework . . ."

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"My dear fellow!" our perpetually busy, shaggy-haired eccentric suddenly snapped. We all turned around. "The new—what we are seeking—is almost always to be found outside the framework."

And opening his mouth (a mannerism of his), he laughed noiselessly in the face of the severe critic. This gave us a new insight into the character of our colleague.

For two years we had sat in the same office with him without having any conception of the man! We had observed only that he seldom shaved and that he flung his overcoat on a chair. We had noted that half a button was missing from his overcoat. Finally, we noticed that he did the work of four men. But somehow we had not really gotten to know him!

"You know, I think I'll tell you an interesting story," we again heard the voice of this colleague who was forever stooped over his work.

We were all astonished: it was the first time we had been so favored as to have him waste his time chatting with us! I had no idea that our conversation about longevity would stir him up so much.

"But I must first run down to the basement and start the instruments working so as not to lose time," he added, rapidly leaving the office.

"Is he a dry old stick or not?" someone asked.

"I don't think so!" our practical joker protested. "There is a lady visits him sometimes. I live next door to him. A young lady! I once bumped into her on the stairs. There she was walking along staring into space. Blinded by love."

"Do you know, he owns a unique sort of ancient watch. It keeps very precise time and has to be wound only once a year." It was the chief who said this.

"Here we are, friends!" exclaimed our greying, untidy new colleague (for we had just got to know him this very day), our work-horse, as he entered the office, sat down at his desk and picked up a logarythmic slide. "You say nine hundred years . . .

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but do you realize that time can stand still as well as fly at terrific speed? Haven't you ever had to wait for your girl-friend to turn up?"

"Yes, indeed," the chief said. "Time can crawl very slowly."

"It can stand still too. Do you remember the story of the scientists who succeeded in growing plants from lotus seeds that had lain buried for two thousand years in a stone sepulchre? Time had stood still for those seeds! Time can be arrested as well as pushed on!"

Saying this, he opened the slide rule and then jotted something down—he was still managing to do his work.

"I shall illustrate my statement with a story which you, regardless of its moral, will find interesting."

And, as he began, he seemed to turn towards me as if his words were destined exclusively for my benefit.

"In a certain kingdom, in a certain state—in our own city, to be exact, the following event came to pass some years ago. On a Sunday, in one of the shadiest corners of the Park of Culture there gathered some six or ten or, maybe, even a hundred well-dressed men for the purpose of engaging in some sort of conversation which they had decided to conduct in the open air. It later became known that, in our Park, there had been held for a period of two hours a—what shall I call it—a symposium of bandits and thieves who, as they themselves term it, were bound by "law." These fellows have their own strict rules. Any transgression is punishable by death. Those who are "lawfully bound" must be vouched for by several sponsors. Any new member of the society must have a device tattooed on his chest: just a few words to identify him at once as "one of them."

"What relation has this story to our theme of time?" the chief softly inquired. "Or perhaps you have not yet finished?"

"I haven't finished. It's a very direct relation. I am just coming to the theme. The Congress of bandits, of the "lawfully bound," pronounced six death sentences, five of which

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were executed. They were unable to lay their hands on the sixth condemned man because complications developed in this case. I shall tell you, first of all, who this sixth man was and in what his guilt consisted. He was the head, the president, or, as they call him, "the big wheel" of the entire society of the "lawfully bound," the oldest and the most cunning of all the bandits. He was sitting in some remote jail, and it was there no doubt, in solitary confinement, that the thought occurred to him that he had, in substance, done nothing in life, had received nothing, and that there was but little time left to live. He reasoned as follows: the whole meaning of a bandit's life could be summed up as the easiest way of acquiring other people's possessions, whether gold or other valuables. But the value and the prestige of possessions in human society are undergoing a catastrophic decline."

"Your bandit seems to have been a theoretician!" the personnel manager could be heard saying ironically.

"Yes, he was a serious person," our eccentric agreed. "I came to like him more and more. This criminal, who had done a great deal of harm, quieted down in his later years and began to read books. Books can be a terrific force! He read numerous books. He was in no hurry to leave the jail—he found his cell convenient for reading and reflecting, and his "lawful" brothers supplied their potentate from the outside with any book, even such as were guarded under seven seals in the official cellars. Yes. . . . And thus he realized that the prestige of wealth was catastrophically declining. Once upon a time, in the remote past, magnates and princes used to make special fishing preserves in bays for breeding moray eels. They used to feed the moray eels on human flesh—that of slaves, whom they tossed into the bay. Such a moray eel, served at a festive board, was considered a supreme delicacy. But nowadays we cannot think of such diversions on the part of our ancestors without shuddering. Once upon a time gold was an anonymous metal embedded in the earth. Then man gave it a name and a value. To have the

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glitter of gold on one's dress or weapons was regarded as the height of fashion. But in our days none of us would venture to appear in society with a gold chain across our belly or any vestige of gold even on a tie pin. The prestige of gold is declining. And where is the prestige involved in owning expensive fabrics? I can vouch for the fact that even the most expensive modern fabrics are finally going out of fashion. To flaunt riches nowadays is a sign of spiritual backwardness.

"What a way of dealing with material values that bandit had, if you please! It would be curious to see what will replace material objects," the personnel manager said. This story had jarred him somewhat because he was sporting just then a very expensive tweed suit with broadly cut shoulders, and his wife, on visiting the laboratory, had carried a substantial silver fox over her arm.

"What things are you referring to? There are things and things. The bandit realized this and pondered over it. He grasped that the worship of material objects was being inexorably replaced by the concept of the beauty of the human soul, which he knew could neither be bought nor stolen. You cannot make anyone love you by force of arms. The beauty of the soul is free. The soul occupied the foreground as soon as gold and velvet surrendered their position. At present, Cinderellas in cotton dresses triumph over princesses in silks. The beautiful cut of a cheap dress constitutes its main value, and that is no longer a material value. The style of a dress bespeaks the taste, the character of the person who created and who selected that style for himself. And it is no accident that many princesses, who have not lost their souls, have begun to dress like Cinderellas. And if we meet some woman laden with furs and fine fabrics, we are no longer enraptured by the lavishness of her apparel, but, on the contrary, we shy away from her as from a spiritual freak who is bent upon making a public display of herself."

"My bandit observed this. He suddenly discovered that,

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throughout his life, he had never possessed such "things" as other men's approval, their friendship, true love, but had rather striven all his life towards something devoid of any real value. Something like a monetary reform had come about. Yes . . ." Here the narrator's voice grew hoarse. He coughed. "But the people, the love and the friendship, of which he was so much in need, did really exist. He, too, knew them . . . There was a woman. But he could not even appear before her. He could not reveal himself, he could not risk it."

"To sum it up, this man wrote down all his observations in a long letter addressed to his brothers, the "lawfully bound," in which he declared that he was stripping himself of his "rank," joining the society of normal, working people, and that he was resolved, by some outstanding act, to gain for himself what he had hitherto ignored in life and towards which he was now drawn, as they say, with all his being. The prison authorities printed this letter of his in a special leaflet. As you can well understand, of course, this document had terrific potentialities and it was important to make the most of it."

"Now consider the position in which our "big wheel" found himself. In the course of his life, he had been sentenced to some two hundred years of penal servitude but, owing to the confusion of the times, he had not served anything like it! He was aware that he could expect no "reduction" from the State. On the other hand, knowing better than anyone the rules of the "lawfully bound" commune, he realized that his "brethren" would never overlook his betrayal and that somewhere a keen knife was already awaiting him. But he felt the need of living just a few years longer in order to achieve that which had induced him to take this step. Thus, even before his "brethren" had sat in judgment upon him, he had made his last break. He was affluent enough, and, as sometimes happens in fairy tales, doctors were available who were able to graft new skin on his face and hands, as well as new skin and hair on his head. They even did something to his voice. They were great craftsmen."

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"Our bandit acquired a set of impeccable papers and became a new man. Within three years he had completed courses at two Institutes. At present, he is nearing his objective. He has conceived an important mission and would like to bestow a gift on humanity . . ."

"That's all very well," I interrupted him, because he kept looking at me all the time. "But what does this have to do with our conversation? With the notion that time can stand still and fly? Or with what was inscribed on the slab: 'And his age was nine hundred'?"

"It is directly related. The executioners are now after him. They are close on his trail. They are bound to get him. The man has very little time left. Very little *time*—do you understand? And this man is determined to relive the whole of his life within a year or two. But what would have happened if he had lived all his years in this way? His life might have added up to nine hundred years or perhaps even more."

"You have in mind, of course, the content of his life rather than its span?" the chief suggested.

"It's very clear you're not very economical with your time!" my neighbor angrily replied. "Yes, yes, yes! The content! That with which we fill the vessel of time. This should be filled only with the strongest satisfactions, with the sensations of the most potent joys . . . ."

"You're certainly laying it on thick!" the personnel manager could be heard exclaiming. "You're preaching the purest form of egoism. You want only to enjoy and satisfy yourself! But it seems to me that we also have to work for the benefit of the people. Ah? What do you think?"

"You're behind the times, that's what I think. You should be taken in tow. You assume that enjoyment and satisfaction are a sin—something you indulge in secretly within the four walls of your room. And working for the benefit of the people is your public duty. Compared with you, my bandit is an advanced man. He has tried all your pleasures and is fed up with them.

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He now admits only one form of enjoyment—that which you regard as mere duty."

"Tell me . . . " the chief began after a moment's silence. "How do you know all these details? This man has altered his face, his identity . . . . He is probably no fool and does not confide in the first man he meets."

"I am not the first man he meets."

"In that case, you must denounce him if you are a conscientious man," the personnel manager suddenly intervened. "You should report him. He has committed so many crimes and broken out of jail. . . ."

"Nothing would make me do it!" our colleague replied. "Notning! He is no bandit now. He is harmless. Even useful. When he achieves his objective, he will declare himself before all men."

Thereupon he pulled out of his pocket his famous watch —a weighty bulbous instrument attached to a steel chain.

"Excuse me. I must go down and check the instruments."

On going out, he paused in the doorway.

"All of you should ponder this story. And you especially," he said, looking me straight in the face—"perhaps you will heed the experience of some people and will stop playing with toys. Perhaps you will put an end to your fruitless polemic with that corresponding member. . . ."

I had no reason to suppose then that life would link me, too, with that affair and make me its second hero, the protagonist's *alter ego*!"

After about half an hour, in order to verify a certain suspicion which had suddenly hit me, I walked down to the basement and almost noiselessly opened the door behind which this man was seated amid the surrounding glitter of glass and brass instruments. The door creaked almost inaudibly, but he leapt aside so violently that he broke several retorts.

"Excuse me," I said.

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"You are verifying your suspicion?" he asked me, recovering himself.

"You are very rash," I replied.

"I am not frightened of you," he answered, returning to his apparatus.

Now that I had established what I had merely suspected before, several other things (about which I shall keep silent until the right time) were at once clear to me.

A short while before this episode, I had come to realize that I was the object of inexplicable attention on the part of a certain individual. A certain shadowy figure dogged me ceaselessly through the streets of the city and watched me from a distance. I had not once succeeded in making out my pursuer's face even though he showed no hurry to get out of sight. He (or she) usually selected dark arcades or gateways as his point of observation. Sometimes he stepped into the sunlight but, as soon as I put my hand into my pocket—to get my glasses—the fellow would stealthily remove himself behind an arcade. On several occasions, I approached those gateways or entrances where this individual, so attentive to me, was hiding, but never found anyone. Not so very long ago we had our first fall of soft, clean snow. Late one evening, as I was walking through the deserted street, I caught the sound of footsteps behind my back and, before I had time to turn round, I realized that it was my shadower (man or woman). I turned and saw something in the nature of a cape or the tails of a dress suit flashing round the corner. I dashed in pursuit like a madman and, when I turned the corner, saw merely a white deserted side-street. I examined the snow without finding any footprints. True, I later recalled noticing in the light airy snow several rapidly melting cruciform prints which resembled the traces of a huge chicken's claw.

In the basement, I recounted all this in whispers to my colleague. He squeezed my hand and said: "I have observed a thing or two myself. You must go now. I have to hurry. As you see, my time is pushing me on. Yes, and it wouldn't do you any

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harm to speed up your tempo. One never knows what might happen . . ."

We were working, both of us, on the same problem, but were pursuing different approaches. One of us was on the right track, the other on the wrong one. But the problem was a very important one, and even an error might help to lead others on the right path. We were investigating the way to condense sunlight. The substance which he hoped to extract would ensure months and years of bright sunlight and warmth for a remote continent whose inhabitants were strangers to the sun. The sun never lights one side of our planet. There it is always night and winter. The fact that my colleague was grappling with precisely this important problem was additional proof to me that I had before me this extraordinary bandit leader, who was in such great haste to live faster. Would he succeed in completing his plan within a year or even two?

After all, I am a person who views things soberly. I mark time year after year, pondering all the time from which angle to set off, because to begin a research project implies putting everything else aside and burying oneself in work a good ten years or so. If only we could harness the whole laboratory to the task! But the Lord be thanked that at least we have been given the go-ahead to concentrate on this idea. We had many opponents. Almost all the members of the Scientific Council regarded us as visionaries. So that was it: ten years to go . . . . How could he do the work in two years?

But, as it turned out, this man had only a few hours left at his disposal rather than two years. The next morning the hospital rang me up. The previous night my extraordinary bandit had been discovered lying all covered with blood near the entrance to our house (he lived in the same building). There were several deep knife wounds in his back. The whole of our Institute was in an uproar; they began telephoning to the polyclinic for the best-known doctors. But it was too late. By

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midday the Institute social workers were already telephoning the funeral parlor.

His death, which he had in a manner foretold himself, affected us deeply. For several days we exchanged expressive looks when coming to work. I proved myself a weakling. At first I gave way to panic and even lost weight. I could not bear any extraneous conversations, and for a week I concentrated on my work. But a week later, when I received the new issue of our scientific journal and spotted the name of S., the corresponding member, in the table of contents, I lost my head and became oblious to everything except that sheet of paper dotted with printed words. Nervously I thumbed through the journal and immediately lighted upon a footnote in small print (the most poisonous attacks always appear in small print). There, in the midst of polite but venomous words, I recognized my name. Thus I fell back into my groove. Paper, paper! who ever invented you! I abandoned my research and, egged on by all of my partisans, wrote an article, putting in it not just one but three footnotes. They were intended to annihilate my enemy completely. The whole department joined in composing these footnotes. If you wished to to see us at this work, may I suggest you visit the Tretyakovsky Gallery and examine Repin's famous painting, *The Zaporog Cossacks Sending a Letter of Insult to the Sultan of Turkey*. This painting depicts our entire department—our chief, roaring with laughter and holding his belly, and myself sitting at a table with my glasses on and pen in hand.

Having re-entered my old accustomed groove, I completely forgot about that individual who had shadowed me from behind corners, arcades and gateways. Following the mournful days you all know about, which had ended in a funeral, the tails of the evening dress appeared no more. I was firmly convinced that it had been one of the bandits and executioners of my now absent colleague who had shadowed me then.

But soon after the day on which I received the journal

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containing my letter of reply to S., my enemy of long-standing, on that very day when I left the editorial offices, my back suddenly warned me that I was the object of observation. I glanced around, but failed to see anyone. Or, rather, when I looked more carefully, I did notice in what was left of a house which workers were demolishing—I did notice in a dark corner a figure of sorts; but it vanished in an instant, disappearing behind a wall.

That very day I was going to celebrate my thirtieth birthday. I intended to invite some friends to mark this festive occasion. But now, as you can see, in broad daylight, an early shadow fell upon me.

I went home and climbed upstairs to my floor. In the communal room, where we all watched the TV set in the evenings, my comrade, the smart dresser and practical joker, was waiting for me.

"Well, shall we go on a binge today?" he asked.

"I don't feel so well," I replied. "We'll have to put it off."

"It's no good sulking on such a remarkable day. Thirty—that's a man's best year!" Hereupon he presented me with a florid necktie.

"Come, let's celebrate, eh? I'll get you loaded!" he went on in a whisper. "I've been lucky enough to get hold of some very rare wine!"

In the meantime, while talking to him, I had noticed a strange woman sitting in the far corner. She must have been expecting me for some time—I felt this in some strange way. Then she got up, took a step towards me; and I became deaf to what my comrade was saying. She was a woman of about thirty, with decidedly sloping shoulders, and very beautiful. Her beauty lay in the very individual and charming irregularities of her face and figure and, particularly, in her frank mournful eyes. This beauty was suddenly evidenced once again in her subdued, gentle voice. I at once remembered that other grain of gold dust which had long ago found its place in the

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hour-glass. That woman now lay forgotten and non-existent, whereas this one was bearing down upon me.

"I have been requested to give you this on your birthday," she said almost officially, handing over to me the familiar bulbous watch on the steel chain. "And this also . . ."

She pulled out an envelope from her hand-bag and passed it to me.

"It's from him?" I asked.

"From him," the woman replied.

I was about to inquire cautiously whether the man who was no longer here had succeeded in discovering the true love of another, the love which it is impossible either to buy or to steal. But I did not have the time. She read the question on my face and, with a gesture of her hand, stopped me.

"That came to pass, it did," she whispered. —"It is still so. And it will be so! But he was not sure . . . I played a game. You understand how it is? . . . But when they let me into the hospital, I shouted to him for a whole hour: 'Yes, yes, yes!' But he did not hear me."

I lowered my head. My poor friend! I understood it all.

Having placed the watch in my pocket, I accompanied the woman downstairs and then returned.

"That's the woman," our smart dresser said in a low voice. "She used to visit him. She never noticed anyone else. You might try to stop her, but she kept right on as if she would go right through you. Love had blinded her."

And then he added, laughing: "She noticed you, though! Look out!"

I retired to my room and tore open the envelope.

"This letter will be passed on to you if I am killed," wrote my no longer existing colleague. "You are very talented. I am writing you because you know more about me than the others and because you may, perhaps, set a greater value on time. Life yields herself to us only once, and we must drink her without stopping. In great gulps. We must seize what is most precious.

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And what that is—I have already discussed with you. It is neither gold nor finery. I should like you to live and experience great joy. You must remember the lightless continent where millions of people are now living. May the day on which you receive this letter prove to be your true birthday. . . ."

I did not read the letter to the end. Suddenly, in a flash, a powerful, happy thought interrupted me. "I am happier than he," is what occurred to me. I still have half of my life ahead or even two-thirds. I need not hurry. I have time for everything."

At that moment a dark solid mass blotted out the window. It must be the house-painters swinging their scaffold up to the fourth floor. Turning over a page of the letter in order to continue reading, I went over to the window, nearer to the light. "But what would house-painters be doing in the street in wintertime?"—I suddenly understood. I raised my eyes and shuddered violently. Outside, on an iron ledge beneath the window, sat a huge shaggy-eared owl with grey whiskers and—what was even stranger—it looked distorted as though carved by some primitive man. It was my owl. I was seeing it in the flesh for the first time. With all my strength I waved the letter at it: "Shoo!" This made no impression.

An idea suddenly came to me, and I began to sweat from pain and fear. Phew! With difficulty I recovered my breath and wiped my forehead. The owl sat immobile on its perch, vertically like all owls. I took another deep breath, wiped my forehead, and left the room. I don't recall how I found myself in the street. It was freezing out. Where was I to go? Yes, that's it! I'd visit my old school friend, the neuro-pathologist, a man of experience and creative bent. My case would interest him, and he would attend to me.

In the lilac dusk, I strode quickly along the boulevard, and almost at once became aware of a hopping step in back of me. I glanced around. Someone now stood behind the

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nearest tree. I could distinctly see a shaggy ear and an unfurled wing. The owl was as tall as I!

The doctor was busy. For a long time I sat near the white door of his office and could hear someone inside pacing up and down with rapid, regular steps. At last, the door swung open and my old school friend appeared in a white gown and a white cap pulled down over his brow. He looked thin and pale from too much night work.

"How goes it?" someone shouted.

"Still the same!" the doctor cried, his face twitching nervously. He did not see me. "Again no result!"

I stood up. The doctor slowly became conscious of his surroundings. He noticed and recognized me, then held out his hand.

"If it's a social call, you're out of luck!"

"It isn't."

"Well then, let me examine you." He took my hand and looked at the tips of my fingers. "How old are you?"

"Thirty . . ."

"I forgot that we are contemporaries. . . . What's worrying you? Is anyone persecuting you?"

"If you only knew who it is! A very odd fellow. You'll laugh when I tell you."

"I know him. Would you like me to show you? Come in here. . . ."

He took me into his office and made me look out of the window.

"My owl!" I whispered. There it was outside.

"Not your owl alone!" the doctor explained. "Mine too. Let me see your hands again. Yes, yes . . ."

He moved to his desk and turned his back on me for a while. Then he turned around.

"Sooner or later, you'll find out about it. You might as well know sooner: you have only a year to live."

The floor suddenly collapsed under me. I would have

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fallen if my friend had not supported me and put me in a chair.

There are people, I know, who are not afraid of death: those heroes have nothing they must protect. I confess I shook with fear. When I complete my task, then I can die. But not now!

"I don't believe it," I whispered.

"Get out!" he suddenly shouted, "You are stealing my time! I am ill myself. I have only a year and a half left!"

However, he stopped me in the doorway and said almost as though he were reciting it:

"It's an old disease, and it mostly affects talented people. They get it in an acute form. People with soured characters ail quietly and die imperceptibly."

"And you haven't yet discovered any cure?"

"We have discovered a great many things. But we haven't learned to cure our patients yet. Still we have discovered a thing or two."

And then he uttered the following enigmatic words:

"He who sees the owl distinctly is already half-saved."

Then he banged the door behind me.

"Do I see it distinctly? I must make sure," I thought.

Then, in the silence, I suddenly heard a very precise ticking: the watch, the bandit's present to me, was doing its job and meticulously counting off the seconds. Hearing the clear ticking, I pulled out the heavy steel bulb, inserted the ornamented key and wound the spring. I turned the key some twenty times until it finally would not turn any more. That was all! The watch was now wound for a year.

"I must hurry! I must organize my life," I prompted myself. For the first time in my life I was driving myself realistically, that is to say, cold-bloodedly.

The clean frosty evening greeted me with gay lights, the noise of cars, and the distant glimmer of stars.

"I shall meditate and gaze at the stars," I decided. And the starry skies seemed to descend toward me as if to give me

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a better view of this majestically infinite spectacle.

"Very well then. Flesh will rot. Let it rot. But thought, thought! Must it perish too?" I closed my eyes.

"I shall not perish," my thought declared in the dark. It was calm, unlike one's emotions. "Look about you," its voice said. "The world of civilized men is only a few thousand years old. How long do objects manufactured by men last? Machines, furniture, fabrics—all these fall to pieces within a few decades. How did we manage to collect all the things around us? Very simply. We first collected ideas: the secrets of smelting metal, the formulas for medicine, the mystery of hardening cement. Burn all the books, destroy all craft secrets, let a few dozen years pass for them to be quite forgotten, and still mankind will start again upon its ancient road from the stone axe. And your son—not your grandson—having dug up a cog-wheel which you had made in your youth, will begin worshipping it as a divinely created miracle."

From an invisible loud speaker above the city came the resonant and limpid strains of a waltz. I did not know the composer. And I even did not seem to hear the music: it was not a full orchestra, just brass; not the brass, but the strings; not the strings, but the sound of my feelings. And when the woodwinds raised their song, when the wood began to sing, it was clear to me that these were firmly locked desires singing gently inside their narrow box—desires that were strictly confined within the boundaries of my short life.

"You wish to live," my anonymous composer told me. "Look at the effect upon you of a few little notes, which I left behind me a hundred years ago after my short and very onerous sojourn among men. Listen; the man who is alotted little time, loves life more passionately and fiercely. It is better not to have but to desire than to have and not desire! I loved life passionately and I am passing on this love to you."

"But listen now," he continued, lowering his voice. "In

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my brief life I experienced no great happiness. And you? Has a grateful man ever shaken your hand—shaken it so hard that your heart was shaken out of its place? Have you ever seen at close range a pair of eyes filled with tears of love?"

These thoughts stunned me. I had never experienced anything like that. I had loved, but I had never yet seen such eyes. I knew no great friendship, had not earned the gratitude of men. . . . Lowering my head, I no longer heard the music, and the city lights grew dim around me. But one thing I did hear—the lively ticking. It was the watch, the bandit's present, doing its work, counting off the time, my seconds: "You have your whole life before you! A whole year! You have just been born! You are younger now than you were! Run fast towards your work! Everything is there—your friendship and your love!"

I broke into a run, leapt into a taxi—fast, fast to the laboratory!—and the taxi driver, shifting into high gear, looked around with amazement at his extraordinary fare.

Leaving the taxi waiting at the entrance, I dashed in and mounted the stairs. In the corridor, beside the hot stove, the old stovewoman, her head drooping, had fallen asleep. I shook her awake.

"Quickly, hand me all my papers! Those I gave you this morning! There was a basketful this morning . . ."

"You should have thought of them earlier!"

At this I groaned and reached for the burning ash of the stove.

"I burned them all, I did." The old woman explained. "They burned well—only your papers burn so well. It made me feel warm, as you see. I even fell asleep."

"Tick-tock, tick-tock," said the bandit's watch in my pocket. Clenching my teeth, I opened my office and began to carry out boxes of apparatus into the street towards the waiting taxi. I had decided to open a branch of the laboratory at home and to work nights. I could earn the highest gratitude of men, but I had not yet even made a start!

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When I appeared, holding a box in each hand, on the threshold of our bachelor quarters, a few men had already gathered in the communal room near the TV set, idlers all of them.

"So, it's been decided—we are postponing the celebration!" the practical joker said to me.

He was fiddling with the television knobs. Football players' legs began to flash on the screen. The spectators froze. Their eyes, dilating unnaturally, became fixed. I heard the ticking of my watch and understood: if our TV set were to continue to work uninterruptedly for the next two thousand years, these five men would go on sitting in this way without a break—and they would be preserved for their descendants like the lotus seeds.

I moved several people, together with their chairs, out of my way, and I carried all the boxes to my room. I then dismissed the taxi.

My owl was still perched in the same place outside the window. I was calm now. The owl was well lit up by a bright lamp in the room. Did I see the owl distinctly? I went to the window. For a while we stared at each other. Then the owl walked back and forth along the iron sheet—exactly as owls walk on a branch in the zoo. It bent over, raised its yellow, triple claw, which looked as if it had been covered with wax drippings, and, like a hen, it quickly, very quickly, scratched its beaks with its hind claw. Then it quieted down, perched itself vertically, and fixed me with two metallic circles—its eyes. I could see my owl very distinctly!

Then I pulled myself together again and began quickly to open the boxes and to arrange the apparatus. Within five minutes my room began to glitter with glass and chrome. It had become a laboratory.

"Will I have time?" I thought. "I need at least ten years."

I tried to remember some fragments of the ideas which had been burned at various times in the laboratory stoves. I attempted to jot them down again, but nothing came of it.

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"This would have reduced my work by half!" I even banged the table with my fist.

At this moment I noticed on the floor the bandit's note, which I had dropped earlier in the day. I had not had time to read some of the lines, and it was these lines that now stared at me from the floor.

"I can be of use to you. Did you grasp what was told you about a certain bandit? Then ask the woman standing before you, and she will give you the notebook in which I secretly copied all your ideas—those which you had been throwing into the stove for the last two years. I intended to make use of them myself, for you did not need them."

"Where shall I find her now?" I shouted, failing to finish the note again. Then I saw the words: "Her telephone . . ."

In a few seconds I was standing, like someone in a fairy tale, amidst a group of people who looked as though they had been drugged by TV, breathing regularly, although their eyes were wide-open. Placing the telephone on the shoulder of one of them, I dialed a number. After a few rings, I heard the sound of her voice.

From that moment another chapter opened in my new, brief life. It began with a misunderstanding, for which only I was responsible.

"You should pick up the receiver at once!" These words burst from me before I had time to realize my rudeness. "Where is the notebook? Why didn't you give it to me?"

"You didn't ask for it," the voice replied. "You didn't even read the letter. And the note said: if you. . . ."

"It's obvious you set no value on time," I burst out again. "Forgive me. . . ."

The receiver was suddenly silent.

"Why don't you speak?" I roared again. "The notebook, the notebook!"

"I am coming," a soft, caressing voice replied.

When I heard her footsteps, I suddenly realized that I

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was waiting not only for the notebook. From the very instant I first saw that woman, I felt gently and imperceptibly drawn towards her, just as a floating twig is drawn from afar towards a waterfall. Was this not a second grain of gold dust that had come near the throat of the hour-glass only to fly over it in an instant? "Well, go on and fly," I thought. "These things do not exist for me any more. . . . For, my beauties, don't you love to be pursued long and stubbornly, and how right you are. And you above all, for you have not yet forgotten him for whom you shouted: 'Yes, yes, yes!' And you will hardly forget him, for how could my not-so-distinguished person exclude from your memory that exotic, improbable man with the borrowed face? I am dead to love. I am non-existent."

At this point she opened the door and entered—a small, gentle beauty with sloping shoulders. "I love you!" everything alive in me shouted. I realized that, in my new life, my childhood was over and early youth had begun. But then I heard a chilling peck at the window. I did not even glance at it: everything was immediately clear.

Barely greeting the woman, I snatched the notebook from her hands, turned my back on my guest, opened the notebook and saw the designs, plans, notes and calculations—they were identical with those which, over a period of several years, I had freely strewn about and burned. I thumbed through the notebook. Aha! I now needed eight, not ten years! I would work at the Institute and at home, and that would give me two more years. I would arrange things so that experiments would be conducted in several directions at the same time. Day and night!

"What's the hurry?" the woman asked, noticing my haste to connect the wires and plug in the apparatus.

"I have very little time left . . ." I replied, then stopped myself. "Life is short, and there is a lot of work. I am in a hurry."

I plugged in every piece of apparatus, and gay little flames kindled in the flasks and the retorts, transparent bubbling

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rivulets ran along the glass tubes, and rare earth samples began to melt in the crucibles.

My owl slumbered outside the window, its head under its wing. To remove my last doubt, I decided to verify something.

"What is that outside the window?" I suddenly asked the woman, pointing to the owl.

At these words the huge bird raised its head and blinked rapidly, very rapidly, with the yellow lenses of its eyes. The woman went up to the window, pressed her face against the glass and shielded her eyes with both hands from the light.

"There's no one there," she said, smiling. Suddenly she stopped talking. She began to scrutinize me closely, and bit her lip as though astonished by some new discovery. There is no one there," she repeated. "But did you see anyone? Are you being watched?"

"No is no," I avoided answering her directly.

Then, all of a sudden she—she!—asked a question. It was her turn now to surprise me and drive me into a corner.

"Why did you change your room?" she inquired.

I was dumbfounded. I tensed up, but made no reply. I was already living under the authority of a new discipline. I began to turn the handle of my calculating machine; I had to make certain calculations. The woman watched me without taking her eyes off me.

After about an hour she could not contain herself any longer: she laughed quietly.

"You might as well tell me where you are rushing."

"Where? A certain man—you know whom I mean—has probably told you already where *he* was rushing . . .

"He told me . . ."

"Well, I am rushing there too. I have lived a whole lifetime and accomplished nothing. But I can contribute something to mankind. I shall have no rest until some grateful man shakes my hand so hard that my heart will be moved from its place.

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I shall work for him. He will come—and that will be a happy day for me."

These words must have pleased her. She was silent for a while, then said:

"Why do you waste time? That is so unlike you. After all, you own a new, a perfect calculating machine."

That was news! Some new gadget! Again I did not answer her. Then she took me by the hand and led me to the door.

"What now?" I asked, stopping.

"Don't waste time," she said, mimicking me. "Don't be afraid! I can gain time for you."

She dragged me off to another apartment—to the one where my extraordinary bandit friend had lived a month ago. She pulled out a key, unlocked the door of his room and turned away, suppressing a smile. But I beamed: the room was full of the newest and most expensive apparatus. It was exactly what I had needed. I began to examine and play with the apparatus, completely forgetting about my companion.

"Aren't you ashamed!" I suddenly heard her say. "You're pretending never to have seen these things!" She was off again.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You should at least have visited your colleague," she replied evasively. "Perhaps you never saw this either?"

An unfamiliar, large, white flower with a pungent smell was growing in the aquarium, on the window sill. The woman made me approach it. She seemed to be testing me. And then I suddenly remembered.

"It's a lotus. It was grown from the seed which lay in the sepulchre for two thousand. . . ."

"That's it," she cried triumphantly. "I give you A-plus. And have you seen this?"

She handed me a calculating machine of the most modern type—such as I never even dreamt of possessing. This device could replace a whole staff of mathematicians armed with simple calculators.

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"May I take this thing?" I could not resist asking.

"You are wasting time!" she exclaimed, raising her voice, mimicking either the bandit or myself. "Yes! Yes! Yes! All this is yours. You can take all the apparatus! Even the lotus!"

It seemed she was annoyed by something.

"Well, yes, of course," she suddenly said musingly. "He altered his face, his voice, he had to change rooms too. So that no one should know or say anything. . . . And even friends. . . ."

I should have pondered these words! But as I have said, I was then under the authority of a new discipline, which had turned everything I thought upside down. I dismissed her chatter with a wave of my hand.

In a single night I had made a huge stride in my work. I proved the validity of my abstract premises. At this rate, I would attain my first concrete results in about eight months, and then I should be able to involve the whole Institute in my cause. All the sceptics would have to give in.

Oblivious of everything around me, I arrived next morning at our laboratory. In the doorway I heard a commotion. It seems that my steadfast opponent S. had already written a reply to my article!

"What an operator!" our chief exclaimed ironically, and each of his words was greeted with a wave of wild laughter from his colleagues.

They were all grouped around my desk, the chief roaring with laughter, holding his belly. This perfect picture lacked only the author with the pen behind his ear, that is to say, myself.

"Well, dear competitor, it's up to you now," the chief said, placing the newspaper clipping on my desk.

But I astonished them. I did not even begin to read the article of that S., who now struck me as a very naive and in no way dangerous eccentric. He no longer inflamed me: another fire had been ignited. I waved him away like a mosquito. I must add, getting ahead of my story, that this S. continued for

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a long time afterwards to print articles, especially for my benefit. In one footnote, he wrote that I was shamefully silent; in others, that I was wearing the blinders of reserve, that I was hiding in the bushes, that, like an ostrich, I had buried my head in the sand. He crowed from afar and flapped his wings like a cock, trying to provoke me to continue the battle.

Seeing me push the clipping aside, my colleagues exchanged glances.

"Can this be you?" asked the amazed practical joker. "Just look at him! He hasn't even shaved! Friends! He has tossed his overcoat on the chair! Well, well . . . Two buttons are missing from the coat! Doesn't he look like a changeling? There's something about him that reminds me of that . . . the one who used to sit here beside him. . . ."

And he glanced expressively at the bandit's vacated desk.

True enough, my character had changed drastically. I had become a different man. I had all at once forgotten the mannerisms of the established scientist; I stopped speaking in a singsong voice; I stopped playing around with trifling problems. I was floating all the time in a kind of frenzied half-dream. Greed for life had awakened within me and, strangely enough, what a change I felt in my conception of pleasure!

What did I enjoy now? I kept gazing at her all the time. She fitted splendidly into my room, having brought with her a folding bed, and she worked day and night with the apparatus. I don't even know when she slept. And I found delight in gazing from afar at her as she sat at the table; I admired the distinctive curves of her head and neck—those of a young mother bending over her child.

And I continued to dream, watching the lines of her head, her neck and her sloping shoulder, that lightly-curved, affectionate arch, by which alone I could have always recognized her; I wanted her to turn around and look at me. She always sensed my unspoken command and, when she turned, she would press her chin against her shoulder. But some perpetual question

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always disturbed her and, after looking intently at me, she would resume her work.

The question tormented her. She resolved to test me again. We had established a certain rule: if there was a break in the work, we made it a point to go somewhere for an hour or two —to an exhibition, to the opera or to a concert. But one evening, having set the automatic instruments and plugged in the heaters, she put her arm in mine.

"We have some free time. A whole hour. Will you make me a present of it?"

I thought it over.

"Well, all right. I'll make you a present of it."

We went out into the street. She dragged me off somewhere, and I found myself walking with her through some dark alley. Then suddenly she asked me:

"Don't you really remember this walk?"

I was tired of all this and did not hide my irritation:

"I'm glad you are becoming less formal. It should have happened long ago. But I beg you to stop your strange game; you've been playing it for two months already, and I don't understand anything. This game is a waste of time."

"Where are you always hurrying?"

At that moment I saw in the shadows behind the street lamp the dark shape of my owl, and its glittering, rapidly blinking eyes. I stopped. I was about to show my companion those two eyes, but I remembered she would not see them anyhow.

"Where am I hurrying to?" I decided to tell her everything point blank. "All right then: I have less than a year to live."

My words overwhelmed her. I seemed to have said the one thing that was needed to produce the explosion. She stopped me, stepped in front of me and, cupping her hands, held them under my chin. I saw at close range her eyes filled with tears.

"If you are convinced that you have less than a year, then

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why are we deceiving each other here?" she whispered.

I was about to say something but she put her fingers on my lips.

"You are *he,* of course you are!'

I guessed the truth.

"You think that I am—*he* . . . your former man?"

"Stop tormenting me . . . Do you remember how you used to hide from me the first time? Why are you punishing me?"

"But I am another person!" I yelled. "Look—I have different hair, a different face. Nothing has been changed in me. I have no scars. All this is mine!"

"You had no scars either the first time. But I guessed right. I guessed at once! Now tell me why, when I called on you with the letter and the watch, you suddenly changed the expression on your face and asked: 'Was there love?' You wanted very much to find out. I saw through your naive cunning." She laughed. "If you only knew how glad those words made me!"

"I shall soon part from you forever," I said.

"We shall never part. I shall find you even if you run away from me again and change not only your face, but everything about you."

"I have less than a year to live. That is definite."

"I don't believe it. You have been saying that for so many years!"

"But *he* said that, and he was murdered."

"They didn't kill him! You're smart. You've thought of everything! And you ordered me to hand over everything to your double—to yourself. You're a cunning one! They will never get you. . . ."

"Ah, the devil! What nonsense this is. . . ."

He must have always cut her short like this too. She laughed.

"I won't speak of it again. Even then you didn't like it. Today you are even better than you were. You are gentler now, you smile so wonderfully! And you speak so beautifully about

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the man who will come . . . I have wasted so much time! Why did I allow myself to play games with you as if I were only seventeen! If you want me to, I shall say that word you wanted to hear. Yes! Yes! Do you hear? Cry out that you hear me!"

"I hear," I whispered. I could no longer fight against the current. The twig was racing towards the waterfall. "Which *me* do you love best," I asked, "the one who was murdered or the one beside you here?"

"The one here!"

I was loved. I saw the eyes. I had only to turn my head slightly to the right to meet two stars glistening with tears. Now I occupied the place of the departed bandit. The days of my youth had now been transformed into an early maturity.

The doctor's diagnosis proved correct: five or six months after consulting him I began to feel ill. In the middle of a bright summer I took to bed.

Apologetically I told my gentle, distraught, love:

"Do you know, my dear, I find it hard to walk. You'll have to take over today, for I shall stay in bed. Turn on the radio."

She turned it on. At once we could hear a loud howling, and through the roar of magnetic storms the fading voice of our dark continent. They were working out there, mining coal or growing cabbage under artificial light!

"We must act more energetically," I said. "We must hurry."

The bubbling rivulets ran ever faster through the glass tubes and the flames flared brighter.

In rainy September, we completed our work on one of the installations. I was in bed, feeling so weak I could hardly raise my head.

"Open the first copper container," I said.

She opened it.

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"An error," I heard her say gently. "We have here only a small lump of reddish coal."

"No, it isn't an error," I answered calmly. "It's merely a variation. Everything has been checked in the other installations. But we can exhibit this lump of coal . . . . Call the fellows. Call the chief . . . ."

They entered, walking on tiptoe as people do when visiting the sick. I had never let them in before; and now on entering my room, which had become transformed into a laboratory, they halted near the door and began to look around them. They did not know what to think of me. Everything amazed them: the walls scribbled over with formulas and the furniture scratched with a nail—I wrote on it too—and the glitter of the apparatus, from which light puffs of warmth reached them.

Then they caught sight of me. My appearance must have surprised them, and they moved with even greater care. Only the practical joker, who did not take his eyes off my companion, whispered something to the chief.

"Give them the report," I said.

And she, like a true scientist, gave them, within ten minutes, a report on our work and showed them the small lump of coal which refused to cool.

This lump of coal astonished everyone, the chief in particular. He was the first to advance solemnly to shake my hand. Then all my colleagues began to talk and rushed pell-mell towards me, seized my weak, thin hands and began to shake them. And I felt as if my heart might burst at any moment.

"From today on, we are all joining in the work," the chief announced. "The whole laboratory!"

From that day on, two of our colleagues were on duty in my room day and night and, in addition, the laboratory kept us informed every day by telephone. The project went ahead rapidly.

In the icy month of December, my companion opened a second copper container, in the presence of my chief.

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"Again an error," she told the chief softly. "This is even worse—this lump of coal is quite black."

But I heard her.

"This error has been accounted for." I said, barely moving my lips. "Go on with the work. Faster."

I had an acute sense of hearing. I heard the chief whisper, covering his mouth with his hand:

"A third error will be the death of him . . . ." Then he added loudly: "H'm . . . I suppose it would be better to transport the third installation to our laboratory. There we shall conduct the experiment faster and more accurately."

"I have confidence in you," I replied.

Thus my wife and I were left alone in our quiet, empty room, the two of us—and also the owl, which had very cunningly managed one day to squeeze into our room through the open vent and which was at present slumbering on the windowsill or wandering under the table, pecking at the floor with its beak. My wife—she had really earned that title—sat beside me as we softly reminisced about our brief youth.

On the third or fourth day I felt worse.

"Please open the window," I asked.

"My dear, there's frost outside. Do I have to?"

"Open it, open it," I whispered.

My wife approached the window.

"What's this? Spring in December! Can you hear? It's thawing in the street, and there's a fly just awakened beating against the window pane!"

"Open it!"

At first she opened the vent, then flung open the whole window, and into the room, together with the warm spring breeze, there burst an extraordinarily pleasant and remote music. It flowed over the city, now fading, now gathering into a mighty wave. I listened to it without realizing that it was the telephone wires playing, spreading all over the world the tidings of man's victory over cold and darkness. From time to time this

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music was accompanied by a solemn buzzing sound that faded in the distance—those were planes flying over the town bearing a precious load. They were carrying the first spring to the dark continent. But I was not aware of this, for I felt very low; I had grown extremely weak; and I waited for my colleagues to bring me some good news. Moreover, the owl alarmed me: it was walking near my bed in a state of strange excitement, shaking its feathers and flapping its wings. There is nothing harder than to part with life if one has not yet brought to a conclusion some project essential for mankind and one dependent upon our efforts.

Then drowsiness overcame me. Somewhere the staircase hummed, doors banged, hurried steps shuffled. But I did not hear this. I heard only the doctor's voice, that of my old school friend:

"He's still alive!"

He sat down by my head and with trembling hands began to unscrew a copper cartridge.

"Faster, faster, tell me!" I wanted to cry out.

And I did, because my sickness had left me.

A dazzling drop quivered in the doctor's hands, drowning the entire room in sunlight. I knew about it long ago; I had dreamt of it. Shutting my eyes, I had often seen it even when I had just begun to install the apparatus. But now I could not look at this too resplendent, little sun. I got up from bed, staggering on my feeble legs. My companion ran to support me, but I stopped her with a gesture of my hands and walked the length of the room by myself. I even stamped my feet! My wife, radiant and unbelieving, leaned against the wall.

"Thank you, doctor," she whispered.

"What for? He triumphed over his *own* death. He, himself, discovered the medicine! It is *his* own light!"

The staircase hummed again, doors banged and a whole crowd of people burst into the room. Here were my colleagues and a multitude of others whom I did not know. I was sur-

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rounded; someone shook my hand. My chief pushed his way towards me.

"You have managed, after all, to put time in its place," he said by way of congratulation. "In antiquity they would have drawn an owl beside your name! You once suggested the hypothesis that the hieroglyphic . . . Do you remember . . . ?"

"But do you realize it has been confirmed," I replied. And I reflected that I had really put time in its place. I had lived a whole lifetime in a year. And how many years still lay ahead —a whole ocean of time!

Whom should I thank for this? I glanced at the window-sill where my owl always used to sit. But it was not there. There was only an aquarium and, in it, a lotus blossom. But outside the window, very far away in the pale blue-green sky some large bird was flying towards the horizon, ponderously flapping its wings.

The ocean of time splashed at my feet. I stood on the shore, ready to begin my life anew, and the mysterious waves of the future fell at my feet, one after another, and then retreated beckoning to me. Tomorrow I shall be swimming far beyond the horizon. I felt somewhat frightened: for a year I had been accustomed to the constant presence of the owl. Could I manage to live without its injunctions? Would not this mighty ocean, which was expecting me, become transformed into a rivulet I could step over without even noticing?

Here I remembered the watch, the bandit's present. At once I felt chill with fright: I could not hear the watch.

I grasped the chain . . . Ah, yes! The watch had stopped. A year, a whole year, had passed. I must wind the watch again!

I pulled out the watch, inserted the ornamented key and turned it twenty times. Then I felt it resist—the watch was going. It had started for the New Year.

(*Translated from the Russian by George Reavey*)

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POEMS

THE DRINKER

The man is killing time—there's nothing else.
No help now from the fifth of Bourbon chucked
helter-skelter into the river, even its cork sucked
under and smashed on the cement embankment.

Stubbed before-breakfast cigarettes
burn bull's-eyes on the bedside table;
a plastic tumbler of alka seltzer
champagnes in the bathroom.

No help from his body, the whale's
warm-hearted blubber, foundering down
leagues of ocean, gasping whiteness.
The barbed hooks fester, the lines snap tight.

When he looks for neighbors, their names blur in the window,
his distracted eye sees only glass sky.
His despair has the galvanized color
of the mop and water in the galvanized bucket.

Once she was close to him
as water to the dead metal.

He looks at her engagements inked on the calendar.
A list of indictments.
At the numbers in her thumbed black telephone book.
A quiver full of arrows.

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Her absence hisses like steam,
the pipes sing . . .
even corroded metal somehow functions.
He snores in his iron lung,

and hears the voice of Eve,
beseeching freedom from the Garden's
perfect and ponderous bubble. No voice
outsings the serpent's flawed, euphoric hiss.

The cheese wilts in the rat-trap,
the milk turns to junket in the cornflakes bowl,
pennies and used silver razor blades
shine by the car keys.

Is he killing time? Out on the street,
two cops on horseback clop through the April rain
to check the parking meter violations—
their oilskins, yellow as forsythia.

Robert Lowell

HAWK ROOSTING

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

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My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly—
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads—

The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right:

The sun is behind me.
Nothing has changed since I began.
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this.

Ted Hughes

SOME FOREIGN LETTERS

I knew you forever and you were always old,
soft white lady of my heart. Surely you would scold
me for sitting up late, reading your letters,
as if these foreign postmarks were meant for me.
You posted them first in London, wearing furs
and a new dress in the winter of eighteen-ninety.
I read how London is dull on Lord Mayor's Day,
where you guided past groups of robbers, the sad holes
of Whitechapel, clutching your pocketbook, on the way
to Jack the Ripper dissecting his famous bones.

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This Wednesday in Berlin, you say, you will
go to a bazaar at Bismarck's house. And I
see you as a young girl in a good world still,
writing three generations before mine. I try
to reach into your page and breathe it back . . .
but life is a trick, life is a kitten in a sack.

This is the sack of time your death vacates.
How distant you are on your nickel-plated skates
in the skating park in Berlin, gliding past
me with your Count, while a military band
plays a Strauss waltz. I loved you last,
a pleated old lady with a crooked hand.
Once you read *Lohengrin* and every goose
hung high while you practiced castle life
in Hanover. Tonight your letters reduce
history to a guess. The Count had a wife.
You were the old maid aunt who lived with us.
Tonight I read how the winter howled around
the towers of *Schloss Schwöbber,* how the tedious
language grew in your jaw, how you loved the sound
of the music of the rats tapping on the stone
floors. When you were mine you wore an earphone.

This is Wednesday, May 9th, near Lucerne,
Switzerland, sixty-nine years ago. I learn
your first climb up Mt. San Salvatore;
this is the rocky path, the hole in your shoes,
the yankee girl, the iron interior
of her sweet body. You let the Count choose
your next climb. You went together, armed
with alpine stocks, with ham sandwiches
and *seltzer wasser*. You were not alarmed
by the thick woods of briars and bushes,
nor the rugged cliff, nor the first vertigo

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up over Lake Lucerne. The count sweated
with his coat off as you waded through top snow.
He held your hand and kissed you. You rattled
down on the train to catch a steamboat for home;
or other postmarks: Paris, Verona, Rome.

This is Italy. You learn its mother tongue.
I read how you walked on the Palatine among
the ruins of the palaces of the Caesars,
alone in the Roman autumn, alone since July.
When you were mine they wrapped you out of here
with your best hat over your face. I cried
because I was seventeen. I am older now.
I read how your student ticket admitted you
into the private chapel of the Vatican and how
you cheered with the others, as we used to do
on the Fourth of July. One Wednesday in November
you watched a balloon, painted like a silver ball,
float up over the Forum, up over the lost emperors
to shiver its little modern cage in an occasional
breeze. You worked your New England conscience out
beside artisans, chestnut vendors and the devout.

Tonight I will learn to love you twice;
learn your first days, your mid-Victorian face.
Tonight I will speak up and interrupt
your letters, warning you that wars are coming,
that the Count will die, that you will accept
your America back to live like a prim thing
on the farm in Maine. I tell you, you will come
here, to the suburbs of Boston, to see the blue-nose
world go drunk each night, to see the handsome
children jitterbug, to feel your left ear close
one Friday at Symphony. And I tell you,
you will tip your boot feet out of that hall,

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rocking from its sour sound, out into
the crowded street, letting your spectacles fall
and your hair net tangle as you stop passers-by
to mumble your guilty love while your ears die.

Anne Sexton

THE LOVEMAKER

I see you in her bed,
Dark rootless epicene,
Where a lone ghost is laid
And other ghosts convene;

And hear you moan at last
Your pleasure in the deep
Haven of her who kissed
Your blind mouth into sleep.

But the body, once enthralled,
Wakes in the chains it wore,
Dishevelled, stupid, cold,
And famished as before—

And hears its paragon
Breathe in the ghostly air,
Anonymous carrion,
Ravished by despair.

Lovemaker, I have felt
Your hungers in my heart,
But lacked your constant fault
And something of your art,

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Unwilling to bend my knees
To such unmantled pride
As left you in that place,
Restless, unsatisfied.

Robert Mezey

AGAIN A GREEN RIVER

Again a green river plunders me
and accord of grass and poplars,
where the gleam of dead snow is forgotten.

And here within the night, mild lamb
has howled with head of blood:

there floods, in that outcry, the time
of the long wolves of winter,
of the well, homeland of thunder.

THE SCRAWNY FLOWER ALREADY FLIES

I shall know nothing of my life,
obscure monotonous blood.

I shall not know whom I have loved, whom I do love
now that here—straitened, lessened to my limbs—
in the wasted wind of March
I enumerate the evils of deciphered days.

The scrawny flower already flies
from the branches. And I wait
the patience of its irrevocable flight.

Salvatore Quasimodo

(*Translated by Allen Mandelbaum*)

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I*

On the pavement
of my trampled soul
the steps of madmen
weave the prints of rude crude words.
Where cities
hang
and in the noose of cloud
the towers'
crooked spires
congeal—
I go
alone to weep
that crossroads
crucify
policemen.

A Few Words About My Wife

Along far beaches of uncharted seas
the moon—
my wife—goes driving.
She's redhaired, my beloved.
Behind her turnout,
a variegated throng of constellations scurries,
screaming.
She weds with a garage,
kisses newspaper kiosks,
while a fluttering-eyed page tinsels her train the Milky Way.
And I?

* *I* has been drawn from *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry* by Vladimir Mayakovsky, edited by Patricia Blake, and translated by Max Hayward and George Reavey, to be published this spring by Meridian Books.

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To me, ablaze, the yoke of brows
has lugged fresh pails from deep-eyed wells.
In lacustrine silks you hung,
an amber fiddle chanting in your thighs?
You threw no baited line
into the regions of malignant roofs.
In sands' nostalgia bathed, I drown in boulevards;
for that's my daughter—
my song
in mesh of stocking gliding
by the coffee houses!

A Few Words About My Mamma

I have a mamma on blue cornflower wallpaper.
But I pace about in peahen colors,
torturing shaggy camomiles with my measuring stride.
When the evening sounds its rusty oboes,
I walk to the window,
believing
I shall see again
the cloud
reposing
upon the house.
But mamma's sick in bed,
and from it
a rustling of people scurries to an empty corner.
Mamma's aware—
this is the helter-skelter of mad thoughts
crawling from behind the roofs of the Shustov factory.
And when the dimming window-frame
bloodies my forehead, crowned with a felt hat,
then I shall speak out,
pushing apart with my bass voice the wind's howl:
"Mamma.

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If I should feel sorry
for the vase of your torment,
knocked down by the heels of the cloud dance—
who then would fondle the golden hands,
imploringly twisted on the signboard by the shop-windows of
Avanzo?"*

A Few Words About Myself

I love to watch children dying.
Do you note, behind protruding nostalgia,
the shadowy billow of laughter's surf?
But I—
in the reading room of the streets—
have leafed so often through the volume of the coffin.
Midnight
with sodden hands has fingered
me
and the battering paling,
and the crazy cathedral galloped
in drops of downpour upon the cupola's bald pate.
I have seen Christ escape from an icon,
and the slush tearfully kiss
the windswept fringe of his tunic.
At bricks I bawl,
thrusting the dagger of desperate words
into the swollen pulp of the sky:
"Sun!
Father mine!
If at least *thou* wouldst have mercy and stop tormenting me!
For my blood thou spilt gushes down this nether road.
That is my soul yonder
in tatters of torn cloud

* A Moscow art dealer who exhibited pictures prominently in his shop window.

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against a burnt out sky
upon the rusted cross of the belfry!
Time!
You lame icon-painter,
will you at least daub my countenance
and frame it as a freak of this age!
I am as lonely as the only eye
of a man on his way to the blind!"

Vladimir Mayakovsky

(1913)

(*Translated from the Russian by George Reavey*)

A NOTE ON MAYAKOVSKY (1893-1930)

Mayakovsky was not quite twenty years old in the spring of 1913 when he wrote the cycle *I* — his first published verse. With the appearance of these four pages, bound in a pamphlet printed at the author's own expense in an edition of three hundred copies, Mayakovsky became at once a formidable presence in the Russian intelligentsia. He was already notorious, however, in other circles. For his age he had a prodigious police record: at twelve he had stolen his father's sawed-off shotguns and delivered them to the Social Democrats; at fifteen he joined the Bolshevik faction and carried on underground propaganda among Moscow bakers, shoemakers and printers until his arrest in 1908. Fortunately, eleven months in prison altered the direction of his career. He had spent them reading, and writing his first verses, and, after his release, turned from Bolshevism to a movement better suited to his talent and temperament—Futurism. "I had acquired a correct attitude toward the world. I needed only experience in the arts," he wrote with the arrogance of a seventeen-year-old. "It was all right for others to be in the Party. They had a university behind them . . . What could I set up against the aesthetics of the past that had avalanched on me?"

Mayakovsky was soon in command of Futurism—the most extravagant and aggressive of the modernist movements which

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proliferated in Russia during the last decade of the empire. Unlike his colleagues, Mayakovsky was quite uninterested in Futuristic "trans-sense" experiments in the arts; he had already found his own bold, original idiom. What he loved was Futurism's anarchic spirit. On the eve of world war and revolution he went about from meeting to meeting wearing a top hat and the yellow blouse of the Futurists, with his face painted with flowers and airplanes, reciting his verses through a megaphone.

Despite Mayakovsky's ebullience in public, nearly all his verses before October 1917 express excruciating desolation. Pasternak, one of his admirers during this period, called these lyrics "poetry molded by a master; proud and demonic, and at the same time infinitely doomed, almost an appeal for help." Mayakovsky's suicidal bent was evidently more serious than the despairing posture affected by so many of the young writers of his generation. After the revolution, he never ceased to write these "infinitely doomed" lyrics, only now they alternated with fulminations on political and patriotic themes, and with satires on the bureaucracy and philistinism of the Soviet state.

Since Mayakovsky's suicide in 1930, he has been canonized in Russia as an apostle of Bolshevism. Yet no writer was more estranged from Soviet society, and, indeed, from any society of men. In the West, he tends to be regarded as one of the early martyrs of Stalinism. The latter view is equally absurd. While it is clear that this wild man of Russian letters would never have survived the purges of the mid-'thirties, much of his early lyrical work foretells the manner of his death. "The heart longs for a bullet, while the throat raves of a razor," he wrote at nineteen. "The soul shivers; she's caught in ice and there's no escape for her." At thirty-six, Mayakovsky shot himself through the heart.

Patricia Blake

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James Baldwin

ANY DAY NOW*

One evening Vivaldo came to visit them in their last apartment. They heard the whistles of tugboats all day and all night long. Vivaldo found Leona sitting on the bathroom floor, her hair in her eyes, her face swollen and dirty with weeping. Rufus had been beating her. He sat silently on the bed.

"Why?" cried Vivaldo.

"I don't know," Leona sobbed, "it can't be for nothing I did. He's always beating me, for nothing, for nothing!" She gasped for breath, opening her mouth like an infant and in that instant Vivaldo really hated Rufus and Rufus knew it. "He says I'm sleeping with other colored boys behind his back and it's not true, God knows it's not true!"

"Rufus knows it isn't true," Vivaldo said. He looked over at Rufus, who said nothing. He turned back to Leona. "Get up, Leona. Stand up. Wash your face."

He went into the bathroom and helped her to her feet and turned the water on. "Come on, Leona. Pull yourself together, like a good girl."

She tried to stop sobbing and splashed water on her face. Vivaldo patted her on the shoulder, astonished all over again to realize how frail she was. He walked into the bedroom.

Rufus looked up at him. "This is my house," he said, "and

* This story is part of a novel to be published by Dial Press.

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that's my girl. You ain't got nothing to do with this. Get your ass out of here."

"You could be killed for this," said Vivaldo. "All she has to do is yell. All *I* have to do is walk down to the corner and get a cop."

"You trying to scare me, motherf*****? Go *get* a cop."

"You must be out of your mind. They'd take one look at this situation and put you *under* the jailhouse." He walked to the bathroom door. "Come on, Leona. Get your coat. I'm taking you out of here."

"I'm not out of *my* mind," Rufus said, "but *you* are. Where you think you taking Leona?"

"I got no place to go," Leona muttered.

"Well, you can stay at my place until you find some place to go. I'm not leaving you here."

Rufus threw back his head and laughed. Vivaldo and Leona both turned to watch him. Rufus cried to the ceiling, "Motherf***** going to come to *my* house and walk out with *my* girl and he thinks this poor nigger's just going to sit and let him do it. Ain't this a bitch?"

He fell over on his side, still laughing.

Vivaldo shouted, "For Christ's sake, Rufus! *Rufus!*"

Rufus stopped laughing and sat straight up. "What? Who the hell do you think you're kidding? I know you only got one bed in your place!"

"Oh, Rufus," Leona wailed, "Vivaldo's only trying to help."

"You shut up," he said, instantly, and looked at her.

"Everybody ain't a animal," she muttered.

"You mean, like me?"

She said nothing. Vivaldo watched them both.

"You mean, like me, bitch? Or you mean like you?"

"If I'm a animal," she flared—and perhaps she was emboldened by the presence of Vivaldo—"I'd like you to tell me who made me one. Just tell me that!"

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"Why, your husband did, you bitch. You told me yourself he had a thing on him like a horse. You told me yourself how he did you—he kept telling you how he had the biggest thing in Dixie, black *or* white. And you said you couldn't stand it. Ha-*ha*. *That's* one of the funniest things I *ever* heard,' and he grimaced, making a dry, barking sound. *"Didn't* you tell me all that?'

"I guess," she said, wearily, after a silence, "I told you a lot of things I shouldn't have."

Rufus snorted. "I guess you did." He said—to Vivaldo, the room, the river—"it was her husband ruined this bitch. Your husband and all of them funky niggers screwed you in the Georgia bushes. That's why your husband threw you out. Why don't you tell the truth? I wouldn't have to beat you if you'd tell the truth." He grinned at Vivaldo. "Man, this chick can't *get* enough"—and he broke off, staring at Leona.

"Rufus," said Vivaldo, trying to be calm, "I don't know what you're putting down. I think you must be crazy. You got a great chick, who'd go all the way for you—and you know it—and you keep coming on with this Gone With The Wind crap. What's the matter with your head, baby?" He tried to smile; his lips threatened to split. "Baby, please don't do this. Please."

Rufus said nothing. He sat down on the bed, in the position in which he had been sitting when Vivaldo arrived.

"Come on, Leona," said Vivaldo at last and Rufus stood up, looking at them both with a little smile, with hatred.

"I'm just going to take her away for a few days, so you can both cool down. There's no point in going on like this."

"Sir Walter Scott—with a hard-on," Rufus sneered.

"Look," said Vivaldo, "If you don't trust me, man, I'll get a room at the Y. I'll come back here. Goddammit," he shouted, "I'm not trying to steal your girl. You know me better than that."

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Rufus said, with an astonishing and a menacing humility, "I guess you don't think she's good enough for you."

"Oh, shit. You don't think she's good enough for *you*."

"No,' said Leona, and both men turned to watch her, "ain't neither one of you got it right. Rufus don't think he's good enough for *me*."

She and Rufus stared at each other. A tugboat whistled, far away. Rufus smiled.

"You see? *You* bring it up all the time. *You* the one who brings it up. Now, how you expect me to make it with a bitch like you?"

"It's the way you was raised," she said, "and I guess you just can't help it."

Again, there was silence. Leona pressed her lips together and her eyes filled with tears. She seemed to wish to call the words back, to call time back, and begin everything over again. But she could not think of anything to say and the silence stretched. Rufus pursed his lips.

"Go on, you slut," he said, "go on and make it with your wop lover. He ain't going to be able to do you no good. Not now. You be back. You can't do without me now." And he lay face downward on the bed. "Me, I'll get me a good night's sleep for a change."

Vivaldo pushed Leona to the door, backing out of the room, watching Rufus.

"I'll be back," he said.

"No, you won't," said Rufus. "I'll kill you if you do."

Leona looked at him quickly, bidding him to be silent, and Vivaldo closed the door behind him.

"Leona," he asked, when they were in the streets, "how long has this been going on? Why do you take it?"

"Why," asked Leona, wearily, "do people take anything? Because they can't help it, I guess. Well, that's me. Before God, I don't know what to do." She began to cry again. The streets were very dark and empty. "I know he's sick and I keep

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hoping he'll get well and I can't make him see a doctor. He knows I'm not doing none of those things he says, he knows it!"

"But you can't go on like this, Leona. He can get both of you killed.'

"He says it's me trying to get us killed." She tried to laugh. "He had a fight last week with some guy in the subway, some real ignorant, unhappy man just didn't like the idea of our being together, you know? and well, you know, he blamed that fight on me. He said I was encouraging the man. Why, Viv, I didn't even *see* the man until he opened his mouth. But, Rufus, he's all the time looking for it, he sees it where it ain't, he don't see nothing else no more. He says I ruined his life. Well, he sure ain't done mine much good."

She tried to dry her eyes. Vivaldo gave her his handkerchief and put one arm around her shoulders.

"You know, the world is hard enough and people is evil enough without all the time looking for it and stirring it up and making it worse. I keep telling him, I know a lot of people don't like what I'm doing. But I don't care, let them go their way, I'll go mine."

A policeman passed them, giving them a look. Vivaldo felt a chill go through Leona's body. Then a chill went through his own. He had never been afraid of policemen before; he had only despised them. But now he felt the impersonality of the uniform, the emptiness of the streets. He felt what the policeman might say and do if he had been Rufus, walking here with his arm around Leona.

He said, nevertheless, after a moment, "You ought to leave him. You ought to leave town."

"I tell you, Viv, I keep hoping—it'll all come all right somehow. He wasn't like this when I met him, he's not really like this at all. I *know* he's not. Something's got all twisted up in his mind and he can't help it."

They were standing under a street lamp. Her face was hideous, was unutterably beautiful with grief. Tears rolled down

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her thin cheeks and she made doomed, sporadic efforts to control the trembling of her little girl's mouth.

"I love him," she said, helplessly, "I love him, I can't help it. No matter what he does to me. He's just lost and he beats me because he can't find nothing else to hit."

He pulled her against him while she wept, a thin, tired, bewildered girl, and unwitting heiress of generations of bitterness. He could think of nothing to say. A light was slowly turning on inside him, and he saw dangers, mysteries, and chasms he had never seen before.

"Here comes a taxi," he said.

She straightened and tried to dry her eyes.

"I'll come with you," he said, "and come right back."

"No," she said, "just give me the keys. I'll be all right. You go on back to Rufus."

"Rufus said he'd kill me," he said, half smiling.

The taxi stopped beside them. He gave her his keys. She opened the door, keeping her face away from the driver.

"Rufus ain't going to kill nobody but himself," she said, "if he don't find a friend to help him." She paused, half in, half out of the cab. "You the only friend he's got in the world, Vivaldo."

He gave her some money for the fare, looking at her with something, after all these months, explicit at last. They both loved Rufus. And they were both white. Now that it stared them so hideously in the face, each could see how desperately the other had been trying to avoid this confrontation.

"You'll *go* there now?" he asked. "You'll *go* to my place?"

"Yes. I'll go. You go back to Rufus. Maybe you can help him. He needs somebody to help him."

Vivaldo gave the driver his address on Bank Street and watched the taxi roll away. He turned and started back the way they had come.

The way seemed longer, now that he was alone, and darker. His awareness of the policeman, prowling somewhere in

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the darkness near him, made the silence ominous. He felt threatened. He felt totally estranged from the city in which he had been born; this city for which he sometimes felt a kind of stony affection because it was all he knew of home. Yet he had no home here—the hovel on Bank Street was not a home. He had always supposed that he would, one day, make a home here for himself. Now he began to wonder if anyone could ever put down roots in this rock; or, rather, he began to be aware of the shapes acquired by those who had. He began to wonder about his own shape.

He had often thought of his loneliness, for example, as a condition which testified to his superiority. But people who were not superior were, nevertheless, extremely lonely; and unable to break out of their solitude precisely because they had no equipment with which to enter it. His own loneliness, magnified so many million times, made the night air colder. He remembered to what excesses, into what traps and nightmares, his loneliness had driven him; and he wondered where such a violent emptiness might drive an entire city.

At the same time, as he came closed to Rufus's house, he was trying very hard not to think about Rufus.

He was in a section of warehouses; very few people lived down here. By day, trucks choked the streets, laborers stood on these ghostly platforms, moving great weights, and cursing. As he had once, for a long time, he had been one of them. He had been proud of his skill and his muscles and happy to be accepted as a man among men. Only it was they who saw something in him, which they could not accept, which made them uneasy. Every once in a while a man, lighting his cigarette, would look at him quizzically, with a little smile. The smile masked an unwilling, defensive hostility. They said he was a "bright kid," that he would "go places"; and they made it clear that they expected him to "go," to which places did not matter—he did not belong to them.

But at the bottom of his mind the question of Rufus nag-

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ged and stung. There had been a few colored boys in his high school but they had mainly stayed together, as far as he remembered. He had known boys who got a bang out of going out and beating up niggers. He was not the kind of person who beat up other people, especially not while travelling in a mob, any more than he was the kind of person who pulled wings off flies. But, as the suffering of the fly had never in the least engaged his imagination, neither had the fury of a nigger. It scarcely seemed possible—it scarcely, even, seemed fair—that colored boys who were beaten up in high school could grow up into colored men who wanted to beat up everyone in sight, including, or perhaps especially, people who had never, one way or another, given them a thought. He watched the light in Rufus's window, the only light on down here.

He climbed the stairs to Rufus's apartment and walked in without knocking. Rufus was standing near the door, holding a knife.

"Is that for me or for you? Or were you planning to cut yourself a hunk of salami?"

He forced himself to stand where he was and to look directly at Rufus.

"I was thinking about putting it into you, motherf*****." But he had not moved. Vivaldo slowly let out his breath.

"Well, put it down. If I ever saw a poor bastard who needed his friends, you're it."

They watched each other for what seemed like a very long time and neither of them moved. They stared into each other's eyes, each, perhaps, searching for the friend each remembered. Vivaldo knew the face before him so well that he had ceased, in a way, to look at it and now his heart turned over to see what time had done to Rufus. He had not seen before the fine lines in the forehead, the deep, crooked line between the brows, the tension which soured the lips. He wondered what the eyes were seeing—they had not been seeing it years before. He had never associated Rufus with violence, for his

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walk was always deliberate and slow, his tone mocking and gentle: but now he remembered how Rufus played the drums.

He moved one short step closer, watching Rufus, watching the knife.

"Don't kill me, Rufus," he suddenly heard himself say. "I'm not trying to hurt you. I'm only trying to help."

The bathroom door was still open and the light still burned. The bald kitchen light burned mercilessly down on the two orange crates and the board which formed the kitchen table, and on the uncovered wash and bathtub. Dirty clothes lay flung in a corner. Beyond them, in the dim bedroom, two suitcases, Rufus's and Leona's, lay open in the middle of the floor. On the bed was a twisted grey sheet and a thin blanket.

Rufus stared at him. He seemed not to believe Vivaldo; he seemed to long to believe him. His face twisted, he dropped the knife, and fell against Vivaldo, throwing his arms around him, trembling.

Vivaldo led him into the bedroom and they sat down on the bed.

"Somebody's got to help me," said Rufus at last, "somebody's got to help me. This shit has got to stop."

"Can't you tell me about it? You're screwing up your life. And I don't know why."

Rufus sighed and fell back, his arms beneath his head, staring at the ceiling. "I don't know, either. I don't know up from down. I don't know what I'm doing no more."

The entire building was silent. The room in which they sat seemed very far away from the life breathing all around them, all over the island.

Vivaldo said, gently, "You know, what you're doing to Leona—that's not right. Even if she were doing what you say she's doing—it's not right. If all you can do is beat her, well, then, you ought to leave her."

Rufus seemed to smile. "I guess there *is* something the matter with my head."

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Then he was silent again; he twisted his body on the bed. He looked over at Vivaldo.

"You put her in a cab?"

"Yes," Vivaldo said.

"She's gone to your place?"

"Yes."

"You going back there?"

"I thought maybe I'd stay here with you for a while—if you don't mind."

"What're you trying to do—be a warden or something?" He said it with a smile, but there was no smile in his voice.

"I just thought maybe you wanted company," said Vivaldo.

Rufus got off the bed and walked restlessly up and down the two rooms.

"I don't need no company. I done had enough company to last me the rest of my life." He walked to the window and stood there, his back to Vivaldo. "How I hate them—all those white sons of bitches out there. They're trying to kill me, you think I don't know? They got the world on a string, man, the miserable, white c***suckers, and they tying that string around my neck, they killing *me.*" He turned into the room again; he did not look at Vivaldo. "Sometimes I lie here and I listen—just listen. They out there, scuffling, making that change, they think it's going to last forever. Sometimes I lie here and listen, listen for a bomb, man, to fall on this city and make all that noise stop. I listen to hear them moan, I want them to bleed and choke, I want to hear them *crying,* man, for somebody to come help them. They'll cry a long time before *I* come down there." He paused, his eyes glittering with tears and with hate. "It's going to happen one of these days, it's got to happen. I sure would like to see it." He walked back to the window. "Sometimes I listen to those boats on the river—I listen to those whistles—and I think wouldn't it be nice to get on a boat again and go someplace away from all these nowhere people where a

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man could be treated like a man." He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand, then suddenly brought his fist down on the window-sill. "I can't stand this place, I can't stand it! You got to fight with the landlord because the landlord's *white!* You got to fight with the elevator boy because the motherf*****'s *white*. Any bum on the Bowery can shit all over you because maybe he can't hear, can't see, can't walk, can't f***—but he's *white!*"

"Rufus. Rufus. What about—?" He wanted to say: What about me, Rufus? I'm white. He said, "Rufus, not everybody's like that."

"No? That's news to me."

"Leona loves you—"

"She loves the colored folks so much," said Rufus, "sometimes I just can't stand it. You know all that chick knows about me? The *only* thing she knows?" He put his hand on his sex, brutally, as though he would tear it out, and seemed pleased to see Vivaldo wince. He sat down on the bed again. "That's all."

"I think you're out of your mind," said Vivaldo. But fear drained his voice of conviction.

"But she's the only chick in the world for me," Rufus added after a moment, "ain't that a bitch?"

"You're destroying that girl. Is that what you want?"

"She's destroying me, too," said Rufus.

"Well, is *that* what you want?"

"What *do* two people want from each other," asked Rufus, "when they get together? Do *you* know?"

"Well, they don't want to drive each other crazy, man. I know that."

"You know more than I do," Rufus said, sardonically. "What do *you* want—when you get together with a girl?"

"What do I *want?*"

"Yeah, what do you *want?*"

"Well," said Vivaldo, fighting his panic, trying to smile,

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"I just want to get laid, man." But he stared at Rufus, feeling terrible things stir inside him.

"Yeah?" And Rufus looked at him curiously, as though he were thinking, *So that's the way white boys make it.* "Is that all?"

"Well"—he looked down—"I want the chick to love me. I want to make her love me. I want to be loved."

There was silence. Then Rufus asked, "Has it ever happened?"

"No," said Vivaldo, thinking of Catholic girls and whores, "I guess not."

"How do you *make* it happen?" Rufus whispered. "What do you *do?*" He looked over at Vivaldo. He half smiled. "What do *you* do?"

"What do you mean, what do I do?" He tried to smile; but he knew what Rufus meant.

"You just do it like you was told?" He tugged at Vivaldo's sleeve; his voice dropped. "That white chick—Jane—of yours —she ever give you a b*** j**?"

Oh, Rufus, he wanted to cry, *stop this crap!* and he felt tears well up behind his eyes. "I haven't had a chick that great," he said, briefly, thinking again of the dreadful Catholic girls with whom he had grown up, of his sister and his mother and father. He tried to force his mind back through the beds he had been in—his mind grew as black as a wall. "Except," he said, suddenly, "with whores," and felt, in the silence that then fell, that murder was sitting on the bed beside them. He stared at Rufus.

Rufus laughed. He lay back on the bed and laughed until tears began running from the corners of his eyes. It was the worst laugh Vivaldo had ever heard and he wanted to shake Rufus or slap him, anything to make him stop. But he did nothing; he lit a cigarette; the palms of his hands were wet. Rufus choked, sputtered, and sat up. He turned his agonized

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face to Vivaldo for an instant. Then: "Whores!" he shouted and began to laugh again.

"What's so funny?" Vivaldo asked quietly.

"If you don't see it, I can't tell you," Rufus said. He had stopped laughing, was very sober and still. "Everybody's on the A train—you take it uptown, I take it downtown—it's crazy." Then, again, he looked at Vivaldo with hatred. He said, "Me and Leona—she's the greatest lay I ever had. Ain't nothing we don't do."

"Crazy," said Vivaldo. He crushed out his cigarette on the floor. He was beginning to be angry. At the same time he wanted to laugh.

"But it ain't going to work," said Rufus. "It ain't going to work." They heard the whistles on the river; he walked to the window again. "I ought to get out of here. I better get out of here."

"Well, then, *go*. Don't hang around, waiting—just *go*."

"I'm *going* to go,' said Rufus. "I'm going to go. I just want to see Leona one more time," He stared at Vivaldo. "I just want to get laid—get b****—loved, one more time."

"You know," said Vivaldo, "I'm not really interested in the details of your sex life."

Rufus smiled. "No? I though all you white boys had a big thing about how us spooks was making out."

"Well," said Vivaldo, "I'm different."

"Yeah," said Rufus. "I can see that."

"I just want to be your friend," said Vivaldo. "That's all. But you don't want any friends, do you?"

"Yes, I do," said Rufus quickly. "Yes, I do." He paused; then, slowly, with difficulty, "Don't mind me. I know you're the only friend I've got left in the world, Vivaldo."

Then that's why you hate me, Vivaldo thought, feeling still and helpless and sad.

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George Lichtheim

IS THERE A SOCIOLOGIST IN THE HOUSE?

Among the things that strike the European visitor to the United States, not the least remarkable is the obsession of articulate Americans with the subject of class. There can hardly be an extended conversation that does not branch out into this topic, usually with a side-glance at the rising flood of literature devoted to the complexities of social status in an allegedly classless society. Both the literature and the talk betray something beyond ordinary practical concern—a kind of horrified fascination, rather reminiscent of the manner in which sex used to be discussed in the days when it was still considered good form to pretend that there really was no such thing. Indeed, the American attitude to class and the Puritan attitude to sex seem to have a lot in common. Both phenomena evidently evoke guilty feelings and an urgent desire for some kind of rationalization. To the European coming from an environment where class distinctions, like sex distinctions, are as much taken for granted as the weather, there is something odd in this almost panicky reaction, though of course it does not take long to discover that a good many Americans privately share the European attitude.

It also does not take long to realize that the official taboo is related to a circumstance of which many Americans are well

* The following remarks refer mainly to four recently published works: *Class in American Society,* by Leonard Reissman (Free Press, $6.75); *Political Man,* by Seymour Martin Lipset (Doubleday, $4.95); *The Politics of Mass Society,* by William Kornhauser (Free Press, $5.); *Power and Morality,* by Pitrim Sorokin and Walter Lunden (Porter Sargent, $3.50).

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of people who are not only propertyless but socially dispossessed and excluded from the ordinary life of the community: people who form the great bulk of the five million more or less permanently unemployed, and who in addition suffer from various racial and social stigmata of a kind practically unknown in other Western countries. These people, as any visitor can perceive with the naked eye, are not merely slum dwellers—to find the equivalent of the Negro slums in some of the less affluent parts of the USA one has to go to North Africa: there is nothing like it in Europe, not even in Spain—but they exist at the lowest rung of aware: the fact that the United States is unique in the Western world in having a genuine proletariat—meaning a sizeable stratum a social pyramid whose slopes they cannot possibly hope to climb. When this state of affairs is considered in the light of the democratic ethos, it is scarcely surprising that some Americans should display signs of uneasiness, and that a good deal of recent literature should be devoted to an agonising reappraisal of the familiar assertion that all, or nearly all, inhabitants of the United States belong to the "middle class."

It must be said, however, that this aspect of the matter is not foremost in the works here under consideration. Although their authors, like most of their countrymen, are fascinated by the subject of class—indeed hardly able to talk about anything else—they do not, for the most part, approach it in a straightforward manner; nor are they primarily concerned with the two-thirds of their fellow-citizens who belong to the industrial working class, let alone the sizeable stratum at the bottom of the social heap; their existence is more or less taken for granted. What really interests these writers is the stratification to be found within the remaining one-third. This is doubtless natural: sociologists, like other scholars, are themselves members of the middle class, and the problems of this group inevitably loom large in their eyes. But it does lead to a marked emphasis on "status questions" which are not, strictly speaking, germane to the issue of class in the wider socio-political sense. This is recognized by Mr. Reissman, whose work is altogether distinguished by a certain cautious willingness to look facts in the eye. The currently fashionable concern with social classification is due, he thinks, to "the shift from the

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Marxian emphasis upon *class* to the current American emphasis upon *status* . . . A 'status' orientation and vocabulary can easily avoid the unwanted innuendoes . . . that Marx attached so firmly to the idea of 'class' . . ." Indeed it can, and Mr. Reissman consequently is at some pains to demonstrate that it is possible to speak about "class" without being subversive. This clearly is not easy in an environment where such talk has acquired alarming connotations. It seems that the only respectable class is the middle class, at least to the organizers of opinion polls. On the other hand, of course, though everyone (or almost everyone) belongs to that divinely favored group, there are really no classes at all! Reissman gives an amusing example of how such surprising statistical results are achieved by those whose business it is to instruct the public about the facts of life:

> The immediate reaction as late as the 1940's was that "there were no social classes in the United States." When pressed, however, as they were in a Gallup poll in 1939, 88 percent of those asked: "To what social class do you belong?" answered "middle class"; the remaining 12 percent divided equally between "upper" and "lower" class. There is really not much contradiction between the initial reaction of "no classes exist" and the answer of "middle class" given by most Americans. Both responses are part of the same configuration of a belief in social equality. The psychological emphasis is upon the word "middle" and not upon the word "class" . . .

But the pollsters also had something to do with it. This came out when a somewhat differently worded questionnaire was framed ten years later:

> For example, in 1949 Centers asked a national sample of adults to what class they belonged, and found that 52 percent said that they were "working class," 36 percent said "middle class" and the rest signified "lower" or "upper class." Part of the differences in identification shown between this poll and the one by Gallup ten years earlier . . . was due to the fact that Centers had included the category of "working class" to overcome the negative connotations of "lower class," with which few persons could identify . . . (Reissman, op. cit., pp. 12-13)

So the earlier result was obtained by not mentioning the

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term "working class"! If only all social problems could be as easily solved.

Behind this kind of intellectual muddle there lurks what Reissman calls "the belief in social equality," or to put it differently, the notion that "class' signifies "caste." This is an old story, and by no means confined to America. It has been an important factor in the rise of democratic movements all over the Old World. Even today one can hear British public men *of all parties* declaim about "the abolition of class distinctions," i.e., the discarding of outworn and superfluous status symbols. "A classless society" in *this* sense is simply another name for democracy. The odd thing is that England, having no significant racial minorities, probably stands a better chance of reaching this goal within measurable time than does the United States. However, that is another story. Let us get back to our four authors.

In view of what has just been said it is not surprising to find that they are all haunted by the ghost of Marx. This is true even of Professor Sorokin, the well-known inventor of a rival system, who might be expected to look with some disdain upon a mere 19th century theorist, and who does in fact take a rather lofty view of the matter. His colleagues, being closer to the ground, are correspondingly more worried. Mr. Reissman is the most worried of them all, clearly because he knows most about the subject. Marx crops up in practically every one of his chapters, invariably to the detriment of the argument, since whenever the fatal topic rears its head, he takes refuge in obscurity. Even so he manages to insinuate a good many conclusions that smell distinctly of subversion, though wrapped in several layers of academese and decked out with copious references to Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, and other authorities of unimpeachable respectability. There is, for instance, Weber's notion that "the class relations of the economic order belong at the level of the national society. Relations at the community level, as a separate analytical dimension, involve the 'status' order." This was also one of the themes of *The Power Elite,* and all through *Class in American Society* one can feel the shadow of Mr. C. Wright Mills dogging Mr. Reissman's uneasy footsteps. Whenever this kind of subject comes up, he assumes the embarrassed mien of a church elder caught play-

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ing dominoes, but underneath his opaque style there is a firm, though cautious, commitment to the notion that there must be *some* sense in the social order, and that possibly Weber had the clue to it. This kills two birds with one stone, for Weber had a theory of society in which social status is almost as important as economics. To quote his own formulation (as cited by Reissman, p. 67):

With some simplification, one might say that "classes" are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas "status groups" are stratified according to the principles of *consumption* of goods, as represented by special "styles of life."

"As has been intimated throughout," Reissman observes (p. 69), "Weber's analytical distinctions offer the most meaningful framework for interpreting and understanding stratification in a modern industrial society. The theory is broad, ranges far, and includes a variety of different manifestations of stratification under one explanatory roof." It is also incompatible with some cherished academic foibles, among which Reissman lists the custom of conducting empirical "research" on the assumption that "class" simply means "occupation group" (p. 161). However, his own nomenclature displays considerable uncertainty over whether any and every considerable "status group" that comes along may be described as a "class"; and so we get the familiar game of trying to establish how many "classes" there are in "Hometown," Reissman's ideal-typical small town. "The number of classes that is recognized varies, depending on the number of social differences that Hometowners can detect and agree upon," he says gravely (p. 182), as though such differences were not, in principle, numberless. (In practice it turns out that there are just three classes: those at the top, those at the bottom—the manual workers—and, in between, the socially active and church-going middle class, which sets the tone and in particular informs all comers that "We don't have classes in our town.")

Notwithstanding his academic caution and his tendency to describe a spade as an agricultural implement, Reissman is basically disposed to admit that things are not invariably what they seem.

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He even commits the alarming heresy of stating that "the economic institution provides the major dimension for stratification in American society . . . it is the economic base that is generic and all others are derivative" (p. 205). Translated back into ordinary language this comes pretty close to saying that ownership is what distinguishes one class from another. If this is not actual heresy, it is the nearest thing to it, and since Reissman also notes that class lines show a tendency to harden (*op. cit.*, pp. 297 *ff*, 340 *ff*), the picture one gets from him is not so different from that painted by Mills. It is true that, by way of light relief, he also provides a certain quantum of standard sociological textbook absurdities, e.g., "Hyman has reported the results of an NORC survey, in which it was found that not only the class of the individual but also the class of his parents was important in explaining his aspirations" (p. 365). But I take this kind of solemn nonsense to be a mere ceremonial bow to the reigning academic fashion. Presumably if one wants to hold one's own in the fraternity, one has to include a minimum amount of this kind of thing, on pain of not being taken seriously. On the whole Reissman is on the side of the angels. His work is much superior to that of his near-namesake, and hence unlikely to win him fame and promotion. It may even give him a reputation for being dangerously inclined to question some of the established idols of the market-place.

No such fate threatens his colleague Mr. Lipset, whose essay collection, *Political Man*, brings together a number of previously published studies and some new material, ranging from strictly professional writings to semi-popular reflections on a variety of current issues. Even a cursory reading of this closely printed and densely argued work shows him to be well in tune with the prevailing consensus of opinion upon almost every imaginable topic. At first sight the reader who has just absorbed a heavy diet of Reissman is agreeably impressed by Lipset's fluent style; but the comparison does not altogether work out in his favor. Reissman's pontifical manner—like that of his masters, Weber and Parsons—is the penalty exacted from a writer who has something important to say, and is careful to guard against misunderstanding by a triple layer of impenetrable academic prose. This does not make for lively reading, and one

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turns with some relief to Lipset's commonsensible discussion of German history, French politics, English social life, the genesis of McCarthyism, and other topical matters of concern to the intelligent citizen. It is only as one delves deeper into these brisk, chatty, well-informed essays that one discovers the flaw in the performance.

It is not that the author does not know his subjects well enough—on the contrary, he has read practically everything and in addition drawn on the combined services of research institutes in a dozen countries, not to mention a staggering list of eminent people who have given him the benefit of their individual and collective help and advice. The trouble is that all this frantic cerebration has been sieved through a conceptual apparatus which is not really attuned to the serious business of generalizing about politics. Not, at any rate, European politics. It may be that Mr. Lipset is sound on the history and the institutions of his native country: it is not for a mere European to say, though this reviewer experienced a slight twinge of disbelief on being informed (p. 169) that the late Senator McCarthy drew his principal support from people classified as "nineteenth century liberals" (quaintly defined by the author as "those who were opposed to trade unions and to the large corporations"). Perhaps he did; and then again, perhaps not. It is at any rate an arguable proposition (though one would have thought that, on ordinary methodological grounds, it was dangerous to draw such far-reaching conclusions from an opinion survey limited to "respondents from a small New England city"). What cannot be argued—what indeed stands out like the proverbial sore thumb—is that when he comes to areas outside the United States, Mr. Lipset simply does not know what he is talking about.

Of this lamentable circumstance, many examples could be given, but only a few can be mentioned in this space. In connection with the passage just quoted, the author—after some parade of opinion-poll figures designed to lend a spurious air of profundity and scientific rigor to the proceedings—advances to a general historical summation, and what is it that he tells his readers? "Like Poujadism, McCarthyism and nineteenth century liberalism are primarily the reactions of the small businessmen." Now I submit that this statement—taken alone and without any corroborating evidence—is sufficient to demonstrate that Mr. Lipset has no real

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hold upon the historical categories he employs, or rather brandishes, with such an air of authority. It is possible—although one doubts it—that there were as many shopkeepers among Senator McCarthy's followers as there were among those of M. Poujade; it is likewise arguable that keeping shop has the effect of predisposing a man against trade unions as well as against taxes; at a pinch it could also be argued that there were sizeable numbers of shopkeepers and small manufacturers among those who in the nineteenth century voted for liberal parties. But even if all these assertions are allowed to pass, the statement remains what it was before: a self-evident absurdity. For the whole point about "nineteenth century liberalism" is that it acted in total and unbridgeable opposition to everything that Poujadism, McCarthyism, or any other form of reactionary populism stands for. In short, the examples cited by Mr. Lipset are radically incomparable; or at least they have in common no more than a single feature which, taken by itself, explains nothing. Rebellious shopkeepers, or even small farmers (another group greatly favored by Mr. Lipset as potential carriers of fascism), do not by themselves add up to a political movement, or determine the character thereof, though they may provide its mass support. It depends entirely on the situation what sort of movement—democratic or anti-democratic—they attach themselves to, and the "situation" is invariably an *historical* one; that is to say, it is determined by an irreversible constellation of unique circumstances. Thus the fact that Poujadism was a ludicrous failure, even as a protest movement, was determined by the discredit thrown upon this particular type of reactionary rebellion by the antecedent failure of the Vichy regime. Or again, the fact that Hitler—who was utterly unlike either Poujade or McCarthy, although part of his clientele came from the same strata—was able to impose himself upon Germany, clearly had a great deal to do with German nationalist reaction to the loss of the first World War. In short, what counts is the exact moment on the time-curve, and the total historical situation of which such moments are part.

Now it is improbable that Mr. Lipset would dispute this. On the contrary, it is more than likely that if the point were put to him he would fervently agree, and then cite half a dozen far-fetched examples to illustrate it. For the trouble is that he seems genuinely

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incapable of seeing the difference between historical and sociological thinking, and hence is perfectly willing to substitute some slap-dash historical generalization for his standard reliance upon statistics, or "analysis of public opinion surveys." It is all one to him whether a "fact" belongs to the distant past or the immediate present, whether it illustrates an historical trend or a current fad, and what sort of situation it forms part of. Anything that can be reduced to measurable dimensions is grist to his mill. Hence his analysis of fascism in general, and Hitlerism in particular, though weighed down with learning and brimming over with factual information, never comes to grips with the subject. It is typical of his color-blindness that neither in relation to Italy nor to Germany does he so much as mention the crucial role played in the political life of these countries by the belated emergence of nationalism. Instead the reader is presented with statistical breakdowns of election figures and other sociological trivia: not as an incidental help to the understanding of what took place—as such the information would be quite useful and legitimate—but as the centerpiece of a theoretical argument purporting to explain why and how these movements rose to power. Neither does he grasp the fact that, notwithstanding competition for votes between Conservative and Fascist parties, there was an effective political alliance between the two wings of the reactionary, anti-democratic, movement, failing which neither Mussolini nor Hitler could have captured the state apparatus. In short, anything not reducible to quantitative measurements, or psychological twaddle about "insecurity" and "extremism," is beyond his purview.

The kind of psychology that is employed to fill the holes in such constructions is well illustrated by Mr. Lipset's attempted analysis of communist totalitarianism. This, of course, is a "mass movement," hence presumably subject to the general rules applicable to "mass society." One of these rules specifies that, under modern conditions, there are large numbers of people whose social life is badly integrated, and that most of these people are located at the bottom of the social pyramid. In a chapter headed "Working-Class Authoritarianism," these not very illuminating concepts are employed to explain—what? Lenin's concept of the party as a centralized vanguard! The argument proceeds as follows (pp. 120

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ff): first, there is the alleged fact that "the lower-class individual is likely to have been exposed to punishment, lack of love, and a general atmosphere of tension and aggression since early childhood —all experiences which tend to produce deep-rooted hostilities expressed by ethnic prejudice, political authoritarianism, and chiliastic transvaluational religion." "All of these characteristics produce a tendency to view politics and personal relationships in black-and-white terms, a desire for immediate action, an impatience with talk and discussion . . ." "It is interesting that Lenin saw the character of the lower classes, and the tasks of those who would lead them, in somewhat these terms. He specified as the chief task of the Communist parties the leadership of the broad masses, who are 'slumbering, apathetic, hidebound, inert and dormant.' These masses, said Lenin, must be aligned for the 'final and decisive battle' . . . by the party which alone can present an uncompromising and unified view of the world and an immediate program for drastic change . . ." And so on, following earlier observations on the readiness of the masses "to follow leaders who offer a demonological interpretation of the evil forces (either religious or political) which are conspiring against him" (*sic*). To this Mr. Lipset adds the following priceless footnote: "Most of these characteristics have been mentioned by child psychologists as typical of adolescent attitudes and perspectives. Werner Cohn, in an article on Jehovah's Witnesses, considers youth movements as a prototype of all such 'proletarian' movements." Why "proletarian" the reader of either Mr. Lipset or Mr. Cohn may well ask? Apparently because this adjective is intended to denote "an aura of social estrangement." That the Bolshevik party had about as much in common with Jehovah's Witnesses as chalk with cheese; that its core was made up of "professional revolutionaries" stemming from the intelligentsia, who also staffed its chief rival, the Populist party (SR); that the ideology of Leninism is to be understood in terms of the Russian intelligentsia's traditional radicalism—these and other decisive historical circumstances find no place in such attempts at system-building. (Incidentally, Hitler's concentration camps were full of Jehovah's Witnesses who apparently did not regard him as a suitable leader to follow, despite his "demon-

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ological interpretation of the evil forces (either religious or political)" conspiring against him.)

If these absurdities stood by themselves, they might be regarded as a passing aberration. But they appear to reflect a mental climate characteristic of the school to which Mr. Lipset adheres. In a quieter and less pretentious, more baldly factual and for this very reason even more alarming and braincurdling form, they also occur in the writings of his colleague, Professor Kornhauser.

The Politics of Mass Society, like Mr. Lipset's essay collection, has for its central theme the analysis of what happens to democracy when it has to operate in a post-bourgeois environment. (Not that either Mr. Lipset or Mr. Kornhauser would agree to this statement; they favor a more involved nomenclature.) In such a society there are "masses," i.e., people who own no property (this point too is not much stressed in the productions of the school, since it conflicts with the dogma that we live in the best of all possible worlds). Such people are not well integrated, and their behavior, as Mr. Kornhauser notes with concern (p. 46) "tends to be highly unstable," reflecting "social alienations," and leading to "resentment against the social order." This mental condition is the seed-bed of "mass movements," which in turn may (but need not) acquire a totalitarian character. "Mass movements are miniature mass societies; totalitarian movements are miniature totalitarian societies" (*ibid.,* p. 47). Such movements "appeal to the most extreme dispositions of individuals and their readiness to go to any extreme in the pursuit of their objectives." This makes them dangerous to democracy (p. 49). "Mass society is characterized by an abundance of mass movements. Other types of society are characterized by different kinds of social movements" (p. 50). How does such a state of affairs come about? "The major set of circumstances associated with the emergence and development of mass movements must include those factors that weaken social arrangements intermediate between the individual and the state . . . Such factors are those associated with *major discontinuities in social process* (author's italics) as measured by the rate, scope and mode of social change . . . Where the pre-

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established community consists of small, homogeneous units, rapid urbanization and industrialization are highly favorable to extremist mass movements" (p. 125). And—one might add—where there is *no* significant urbanization and industrialization (for example in the Middle East), "extremist mass movements" have been a prominent feature of social life, not only in recent times, but at *all* times. But never mind. Let us not worry either about Professor Kornhauser's queer definition of "extremism," which could easily be stretched to include every shade of patriotic activity, notably that of national resistance movements. Let us rather turn to his political conclusions (p. 141):

In summary, where the introduction of democratic rule is based on a pluralist society, especially a balance of classes and religious groups, it will tend to be strong and viable; but where its introduction is not accompanied by multiple independent groups capable of fighting for the sustenance of individual rights, and at the same time ready to support a basic framework of authority, democracy may readily lose out to new forms of autocracy.

This is probably meant to suggest a reason why democracy works fairly well in the United States and in England, but it leaves unexplained why it failed to work in the Weimar Republic, than which no more pluralist balance of classes, churches, and even territorial units ever existed. Of course the answer is that the "balance" was not a harmonious one, but how were the framers of the Weimar Constitution to know? On paper they had created the perfect pluralist balance. If it came unstuck, the explanation once more has to do with history—a closed book to Messrs. Lipset and Kornhauser.

Now for a sample of the new sociology when applied with minute care and extreme statistical precision to a single problem:

Data showing that extreme personal deviance and extreme political behavior do not vary together . . . indicate that different social conditions may give rise to each. Thus, if the proportion of the electorate which supports the Communist party may be taken as an indicator of the extent of extremist political behavior in a society, and if the proportion of the population recorded as suicides, manslayers, and alcoholics may be used as indicators of the extent of personal deviance in society, then it may be

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shown that countries characterized by relatively strong Communist movements are not generally characterized by relatively high rates of personal deviance . . . More precisely, if Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, are ranked by size of the Communist vote in the first election after 1949, and if they are ranked by proportion of suicides in 1949, *the rank order correlation between suicide rate and Communist vote is* -.26. If the same countries are ranked according to rate of homicides rather than suicides, *the rank order correlation between proportion of manslayers and of Communist voters is* -.08. If these countries are ranked by proportion of alcoholics and of Communist voters, the correlation is -.38. We may conclude that there is *no evidence here for a positive relation between conditions that favor mass deviance and those that favor personal deviance* . . . (Kornhauser *op. cit.* pp. 91-92, author's italics throughout.)

We may also conclude that a sense of reality (not to mention a sense of humor) is not among the prerequisities of this kind of "research." Otherwise it might have occurred to the author of the passage just quoted that there is something seriously wrong with a method that enforces such absurdities as trying to compare suicide rates and voting behavior. What would Professor Kornhauser say if it were suggested to him that to the average person in the industrial belt around Paris, voting Communist seems a perfectly ordinary thing to do, rather like going to the corner *bistro* for a drink, and not in the least comparable with cutting one's throat or swallowing arsenic? Would he brush such objections aside or would he mentally tag the critic as a potential subversive? Probably both.

We pass from one brand of academic day-dreaming to another, slightly less respectable. Our target so far has been the correlation—to use professional language—of sociological research-mongering and accelerated de-control over ordinary reality. With our final specimen, *Power and Morality,* by Messrs. Sorokin and Lunden, we take leave of sense altogether and enter a realm where the mind ranges freely over subjects as remote from each other, and from any conceivable relation to the ostensible theme of discussion, as the philosophy of Yang Choo and the suicide of Ivar Kreuger. Here, for what they are worth, are a few extracts,

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chosen from among literally dozens of a similar kind, and by no means madder than the others:

These ideologies (sc. of Machiavellism) have been more fully developed by many thinkers of ancient, medieval and modern times, like the "Indian Machiavelli" Kautalya (in his *Arthasastra*), Yang Choo in China, Thrasymachus, Thucydides, Callicles, Carneades, Sextus Empiricus, and Lucian, in the (*sic*) ancient Greece and Rome; by Pierre du Bois, Marsilio of Padua, Machiavelli, Vico, Bodin, Hobbes, Croce, Sorel, Pareto, Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, and other defenders of rulers' freedom from moral restrictions, of the autonomy of politics from ethics, of the justification of a morally reprehensible but successful policy by its very success . . . (p. 19)

A moral and mental schizophrenia seems to characterize all forms of government which govern mainly by murderous, "diplomatic," and other compulsory means . . . Similar split personality was shown by Stalin, Hitler, Napoleon, Peter the Great, Cromwell, Charles V and Philip II of Spain, Louis XIV, Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, Nero, Diocletian, Constantine the Great, Asoka, and by most monarchs, dictators, commanders, inquisitors, etc. In a milder form this moral schizophrenia also marks the high ranks of democratic government personnel . . . P. Jacoby, F. A. Woods, P. A. Sorokin, and other investigators of the mental and moral properties of monarchs, unanimously (*sic*) agree that *the percentage of geniuses as well of the feebleminded and insane is much greater among the royal families than among the general population.* Also, the frequency distribution among monarchs in the categories of: above average, average, and below average, differs quite markedly from the frequency distribution of scholastic grades among the students of our colleges . . . Of the 354 monarchs studied by F. A. Woods, 143 were above average . . . (pp. 50-52)

. . . despite the lack of precise and systematic statistics, the existing data do not allow any doubt that *the powerful, and/or autocratic rulers of the states display in general a much higher rate of patricides, matricides, fratricides, uxoricides, and murders of their relatives, than does their ruled population* . . . Depending upon the period, country, occupation, sex, age, race, etc., the murder rates for the ruled population fluctuate between 0.0008 and 0.2 per 100 persons of the total . . . (pp. 58-61)

After this it comes as something of a relief to learn that in democracies the trouble consists mostly in "crime against property,

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sex, good mores, and in lighter crimes against person" (*sic*); though the authors note with concern that if one compares the record of 20,000 average American citizens with that of 20,000 outstanding citizens (including "all the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the United States and members of their Cabinets"), the crime rate for the latter group is markedly higher (p. 75). Still, by comparison with such people as Thucydides, Nero, and Machiavelli, the United States comes out fairly well.

While criminality among rulers appears to be a constant phenomenon, a special problem characteristic of our epoch arises from the alarming circumstances that "the Sensate form of culture which has been dominant in the Western World during the last five centuries is disintegrating" (p. 117), in consequence of which "Ideologies of John Locke, Rousseau, Marx, and other varieties of democratic, liberal, progressive, conservative, socialist, syndicalist, communist, anarchist ideologies; those of equality, freedom, free enterprise, planned economy, welfare society—all these ideologies which previously inspired are at present about dead." Exactly what my aunt Ida always said, only she had not studied sociology and so could not express herself in such elevated language. Does someone object that Professor Sorokin is not a real, honest-to-goodness sociologist, but a Toynbeean prophet in sheep's clothing? Then let him consider the almost endless list of his publications, and his apparent success in getting both the public and the academic world to take him seriously. Another possible explanation might be that the author of the above quotations is quite simply dotty. This I believe to be the case, but the fact remains that his colleagues have not so far mustered up sufficient courage to make a public announcement to this effect. Could it be that they fear the resulting discredit to their profession, were it officially admitted that one of its most widely known representatives is, to put it quite plainly, not quite in his right mind?

Whatever the answer to these and similar questions may in the end turn out to be, it must, I think, be admitted that sociology offers the layman more entertainment, and a wider range of bizarre contrasts in tone and substance, than any other intellectual discipline, not excluding psychoanalysis. Perhaps this state of affairs should not be taken tragically. After all, every

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new branch of learning has had to go through a phase of wild growth. Medicine sprouted from primitive witch-doctoring; chemistry is supposed to have had its roots in alchemy. There must at one time have been numbers of otherwise sane and respectable people—doctors, pharmacists, and the like—who in their spare hours dabbled in magic. How long was it before they reluctantly abandoned their search for the Philosophers' Stone, or gave up trying to make gold in their back kitchens? Bearing in mind the time it took to shed these aberrations, one should not perhaps worry too much about the Sorokins of this world. The real trouble in any case is more deeply rooted. It has to do with the uncritical veneration of quantitative measurement, and the resulting superstitious belief that meaningful conclusions can be extracted from the juxtaposing of heterogeneous evidence—if this reviewer may for a moment be permitted to lapse into jargon. This belief, alas, is not confined to the more eccentric members of the profession; it has its stalwarts among people who, by the usual criteria, must be classed as sane. Until they are cured of their delusion, it is to be feared that the public will continue to treat even the most serious and reputable productions of the school with a scepticism doubtless wounding to their authors, but not wholly unmerited, and in any case less harmful than the mutual praise and encouragement practised within the walls. What is needed now is for some leading sociologist to get up in public and announce in plain terms that there is no such thing as statistical phlogiston.

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Victor Anant

THE HYPNOTIZED PEOPLE

It is characteristic of people born, historically speaking, on a borderline and reared in a no-man's land of values to live lazily; and lazy living, in plainer words, means living by opportunism, treachery, cowardice, hypocrisy and wit. There is no effort implied in such a way of life, no awareness of a need to make a deliberate choice. It is a fact of nature—just as, in politics, the notorious unreliability of border areas may primarily be a result of their geographical situation.

I know this from direct reflection on my own situation. I am one of these people. My generation of urban Indians was born when the movement for independence was just gathering momentum, between 1925 and 1935. We were bred through an interregnum of frustration, dissension, prolonged suspense and struggle. We finally saw freedom arrive not with an ideological bang but with a whimper of political expediency. And we have lived through more than a decade of self-government.

The generic term for us is "Macaulay's bastards." Though the introduction of English as the medium of education in India is attributed to Lord Macaulay,* we were, in terms of the assembly

* "The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach English, we shall teach languages in which, by universal confession, there are no books in any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether, when he can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession, whenever they differ from those of Europe differ for the worse; and whether, when we can patronise sound philosophy and true history, we shall countenance at the public expense, medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier —astronomy which would move laughter in the girls at an English boarding school—history abounding with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long—and geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter."

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line, the first near-perfect products of this system. But this term means more than the simple truth that English is the language largely used by us, although we may be able to get by in one or the other of the many homespun Indian languages. It means that people like me are heirs to two sets of customs, are shaped, in our daily lives, by dual codes of behavior. For example: my generation on the one hand declared its agnosticism, and on the other tamely succumbed to the old rituals; we yearned for romantic love but were reconciled to marriage by the well-established method of matching horoscopes to a girl selected for us by our parents; outside our homes we smoked, consumed alcohol, and ate meat when available, but at home we were rigidly puritan and vegetarian; we glibly talked about individual salvation although we belonged to a very closely knit joint-family system.

Until India became independent there was, in the minds of most of my generation, no dismay at the contradictions inherent in our way of life. This was due to moral inertia and flabbiness. If we had then tried to come to terms with our two influences we may have been able to see them as mutually antagonistic, and we would then have been compelled to make a choice. The majority of Indians were engaged in a struggle for political independence, but the method of warfare corresponded to our mental slovenliness and to our physical lack of energy: "freedom" was a national enterprise and all our moral anguish could be contained in one word—slavery.

My generation was an enthusiastic body of freedom-mongers; many of us must have served terms of imprisonment. Because our patriotism was never suspected, not even by ourselves, we were able to feel fully integrated members of one vast community, sharing one purpose, creating one destiny. But was this not, simply, the laziest way out? When all that was demanded of us was to lie down in multitudes in front of trains or on the streets, and walk in chanting unison to crowd the jails, which one of us could fail to respond? Although this came at the end of our youth we did not grow into manhood through Indian independence. We were just sucked into a shuffling, sleep-walking mass and dreamed of waking up in some cloud-cuckoo land of bliss. We had all the grandeur and all the emptiness of a hypnotized people.

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The obsession of those times can best be seen in the work of Indians who were then writing in English (with one exception, Mr. R. K. Narayan). Indian novels published abroad before 1947 were essentially political. Their authors were propagandists for the cause of independence, for the strategy of non-violence and for the efficacy, not the morality, of passive resistance. Their whole vocabulary was derived from, and based on, politics. The word *satyagraha,* for example, literally means a search for—or a profound yearning for—truth. But by constant association with politics there is no more magic left in this word and it is used today only to categorize a specific device or technique for political purposes. Until independence, therefore, contemporary Indian writing did not serve as a vehice for adventurous imaginations. It stands only as a record of a phase in Indian history. Because that period in history is significant, the writing is also significant; but because of the very nature of their preoccupations, those writers all seem to be posing *one* problem of a nation, not the *many* problems of an individual. Not one Indian—or a type of Indians—but a whole community was the hero.

This emphasis on the community left deep marks on us. One of them was the need to create and worship living political personalities or national heroes. And so our politicians and leaders automatically became repositories of our faith, our hopes and our values. My generation had three to choose from. It is, again, a sign of our sloth that we chose the one least likely to embarrass us, least likely to wrench us out of our opium dream. To begin with there was Gandhi—a unique phenomenon, a saint. We knew that we would never measure up to his kind of greatness. Then there were the uncomprising radicals, like Subhas Chandra Bose. We did not possess the guts for their kind of extremism and shied away from them. Finally, Nehru. Here was a social democrat, adopting Gandhian means for "progressive" ends, a man of letters, a bit of a philosopher, agnostic, emotional, romantic, glamorously torn within himself, and for all that a natural sceptre-and-crown figure. We settled for him.

It was not possible for us to conceive of any heroism outside politics because none existed. Personality cult politics in emergent states, or in advanced states, reflect the poor quality of artistic

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imaginations at that time, or the loss in vigor of the exploratory mind. Bertolt Brecht has said: Unhappy the land that has no heroes; no, unhappy the land that has need of heroes. To which an Indian of my time may add: Unhappy the hero who has no nation; no, unhappy the hero who has need of a nation. Exclusive participation in the quest for nationhood thus stifled all desire to discover ourselves, blinded us to the excitement and danger to be experienced in the search for self-hood. We went around like people without underwear, wearing just a large, communal great-coat. We were completely devoid of any sense of intimacy with ourselves. There was no need to define ourselves because questions of personal morality never even arose. Instead, we joined in a nation-wide moral mudbath. Or, alternatively, we simply left it to Gandhi who, by his periodic fasts, undertook to cleanse the national soul.

Another mark of this non-individual basis of our lives was the habit to turn into abstract terms any particular question. Nothing was specific. We used to sit around in coffee houses, those dens of communal fantasy-making, talking for hours about "democratic socialism and communism," "ends and means," "English or Hindi as the lingua franca"; or just talking; dabbling in the cosmos without knowing the ground on which we stood; drawing up charters for a world religion; or making various formulae for one world. In the evenings we would return to our suburban houses mentally too exhausted to observe the fascinating complexities of our bourgeois lives which should have been our only real starting point.

The result of this kind of abstruseness is best summed up by what happened to an Indian mystic friend of mine who commutes now between the pink gin and champagne salons of literary London and the cold, hard floor of a guru's ashram in India. He was commissioned by an American publisher to write a sociological study of India after independence. He was paid a large advance in dollars. About a year later he submitted a manuscript which began, "India does not exist and I do not exist. This being the Nature of Reality . . ." and elaborated upon this theme in a hundred thousand utterly incomprehensible words. The manuscript came back with a letter which said, "Since India does not exist and you do not exist, the contract does not exist, and the

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question of paying you the balance does not exist. We are so deeply moved by your revelation that from now on you may be assured we do not exist for you. In fact, at this rate we wonder how we could exist for anybody at all." My friend sighed as he said to me: "The West will never understand *maya*. It is too materialistic."

I have described all this in some detail to show why, with independence, in 1947, my generation in particular was unable to respond heroically to the moral confusion that was soon to prevail. We were ready to disintegrate because we were wholly unprepared for the shock of self-recognition. It was as if a huge fog had lifted and in the dazzling clarity of the aftermath we saw ourselves as we had never imagined possible, each with distinctly separate unrecognizeable faces. Our pathetic inability to create a moral order to live by was brought into sharp focus by three catastrophic events which came soon after independence.

The first was when, as a result of partition (never accepted by our leaders for what it was, a recognition of the British assumption that there were two Indias, Muslim and Hindu, but slurred over as a political compromise), the frontier areas between Pakistan and Indian erupted in savage scenes of murder, arson, loot and destruction unparallelled in Indian history. The second was the assassination of Gandhi, a man whom every Indian deified. The third was the shocking use of military force against the native states of Junagadh and Hyderabad and against the raiders in Kashmir. Suddenly we saw our nakedness. Our moral complacency (or national consciousness) was nothing more than a series of superficial lies. But what private means did we have to hide our shame? What was the meaning of being an Indian?

For the first time we saw the cause and consequence of our laziness. The contradictions smouldering underneath the surface, the contradictions ignored by us, had already slowly drained us of all daring, of all creative impulses. We realized we had been living until then on an *ad hoc* basis, taking what we could from the petty-cash boxes of two different cultures and were suddenly confronted with our bankruptcy. Where could we find the cultural capital needed to respond to the challenge that freedom had brought in its wake?

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It was after these events, in the early years of independence, that most of my generation began to turn towards England. A curiously self-analytical tremor may be detected in writers published abroad since 1947. The theme of national aspiration and a national cause is relegated to the background. We have, instead, themes of individual aspiration and self-propaganda. There is, for example, the bizarre self-mockery and pungent satire against holy men in Mr. G. V. Desani's *All About Mr. Hatter*; there is the unexpected homage paid to dear departed British liberal humanism in Mr. Nirad Chaudhuri's *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*; the delicious drawing-room anguish incorporated into the themes of Indo-British romance in the work of Miss Santha Rama Rau, Miss Kamala Markendeya and Dr. Balachandra Rajan; but the important, significant trend in this new range of articulateness is the *distance* now created between the individual Indian and India. Alienation has arrived in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta.

In 1952, when I left India for England, I was certain I was a Briton, *even* in the coloring of my skin. (Did not my mother say she had found a "very fair" girl for me whom I should marry before I left?) If independence has resulted in self-consciousness, and self-consciousness in alienation, I was sure England would make me a whole man again. (I did not know it then, but I assumed there was some superior merit in not being split.) There were, of course, practical reasons which I did not deny myself; the difficulty of earning a living in India, with the prevailing grimly nationalistic mood; the numerous attractions of a Welfare State; visions of sexual freedom; good, English beer. But this materialistic pill was coated with a liberal amount of ideological sugar.

First, I thought of my relationship with the English language. I had already begun to write when I was fourteen, and could not use any Indian language to express myself. My first effort was a poem, and I mention it here because it has interesting psychological undertones. It was addressed to a girl who had turned me down for another boy and the poem was charged with sexual contempt for her, treating of her as a prostitute.

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About this time, too, I suffered a public humiliation in college. Again, English was connected. It was during our essay period. The professor, a woman, looked upon me as an undesirable element in class and was waiting for an opportunity to ridicule me. The trouble was I was always first with my essay. That day she found me brooding, chewing on the end of my pen. She asked me, "Have you finished your essay?" I stood up and replied, "My pen is leaking, madam." I was summoned to her table and made to stand facing the class. She pointed to me and, not concealing her delight, said, "This boy has been learning English since the age of four. And yet, if I were to ask him a simple question like, 'Where are you going?' do you know what he'll reply? He'll reply, 'My grandmother is dead, madam.' (She waited for the class to stop laughing.) I ask him if he's finished his essay and he turns round and tells me his pen is leaking! When will you learn to speak in English, boy?" Everybody enjoyed my mortification. But the confusion in my mind was the result of something deeper than ridicule; it was the result of a painful discovery. I felt that evasion was an instinct native to me; precision had to be earned, precision was a sign of civilization. I was speaking English, but not *in* English. The explanation of my inadequacy was to be found in that loaded preposition. This curious association of the English language with two women, one developing into inverted contempt, the other into self-pity, began, I believe, my *sensual* attitude to English, my looking upon it as an instrument of sensual analysis.

There is a morality inherent in a language. When you are born into a language you wear this morality with natural ease: it is your skin. But when you are forced to recognize the foreignness of a language then you are in the singularly terrifying position of being aware of a whole range of moral implications that have to be discovered step by step. You are aware of the urge to experience every nuance of this morality and to create a relationship with words which may not be related to your native instincts. Every little whisper, every caress, becomes larger than life, frighteningly charged, and the deeper you go the more hopelessly tongue-tied you get, until you have ultimately either to kill

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the language or be killed by it. This is what, I think, Nabokov means when he calls *Lolita* his "love affair with the English language." His sensual strangeness forces him to indulge self-consciously in every kind of exploration of a child love, and he sees depths the natives do not see. By a cathartic process his exploration of a language becomes a profoundly personal mode of sex, and he shocks even such wide-awake and liberal natives as Mr. Philip Toynbee.

Secondly, I was disturbed by the fact that an imperial power, concerned mainly with economic aggression and not, in the old sense, with any proselytizing purpose, should inspire religious awe in me, born and brought up as a Brahmin. In the fifth century A.D. St. Thomas, a Syrian Christian, arrived in Kerala and founded a church. Today twenty per cent of the people of Kerala are Christians. Vasco da Gama came with the Pope's blessings on his voyage of discovery in the fifteenth century and landed on the West coast. Today Goa is still firmly Catholic and in the stern grip of Portuguese imperialism. But except for children of British parentage (and Naga tribesmen) there are no Christians to speak of in the rest of India. I wondered what strange power the Church of England possessed that it could make me feel Christian, stir in me a protestant conscience, even though I was not a convert in any ritual sense.

Thirdly, I could not help feeling that the political victory belonged to Britain and not to India. Thinking again of French and Portuguese possessions in India, there seemed to be a magnanimity of vision and much human charity in the manner in which Britain had transferred power to Indians. Only the moral, surely, recognize morality? Moreover, what better evidence of Britain's victory than that the new republic remained, of its own volition, within the Commonwealth, recognizing the Queen as head of it?

It is only after seven years in London—broken by a one-year return to India—that I see how false my reasoning was, that I have never been, and can never be, a Briton, and that if I had then been able to look deeper into myself I could have seen my real motives. In these seven years I have lived largely

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in relationship to India, which means I have lived incestuously with myself, and am able to take Britain without false emotion and incorrect reasoning.

To mention the materialistic aspects first. Welfare State amenities are useless for my kind of writer. I thrive on adversity. If I felt completely safe I would perhaps stagnate as a writer, because writing to me is fundamentally a rebellion against a sense of ancient security, a security that ultimately destroys the need to create, that lulls one into self-deception. I discovered, too, that I have a deep-rooted prejudice against doctors and curative drugs of any kind. I prefer to heal myself by my own devious ways and even simulate sickness when I feel too healthy. I have even cultivated my own nervous breakdown and gone away and quietly had it and come through it by myself, with my sense of the comic in this game with myself remaining intact.

If nationalistic India is grim, nationalism is even more deadly and smug in England. It produces pompous statesmen like Mr. Harold Macmillan who leave Mr. Nehru far behind. Retaining the H-bomb, in effect as a deterrent against the United States, wanting to form a non-nuclear club so that France (and the Europeans) may be blackmailed into not wanting the bomb—for hyprocrisy of such a high order Britain still remains unequalled.

Sexual freedom: the kind that exists in London is only sexual hysteria. It bores me stiff. And, again, I was startled to discover the range of perversities here, including an obsession with necrophily shown by young writers, and one case of a man who listened to a tape recording of the sighs made by a woman during an organism. At the same time sexual prudery, with all its attendant class inhibitions, on sale every week in at least three lots at fivepence a time—I mean the women's magazines. I cannot, therefore, like an Indian friend of mine, claim that the first time I held an English woman I felt "the whole of the British Empire crumbling in my arms." There seems to be no awareness of sex at all in England, no awareness that sex, like all the essentially simple things of life, is not sporadic, boisterous, haphazard, but is a slow, repetitive, educative process to be savored anew.

Nor do cultural interests hold me in thrall. I find I read more American or continental writers than British ones, for to be

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British seems to imply that one does not ask fundamental questions. I read American reviews more seriously than I do British ones. And as for food I often cook an Indian meal for myself, and find that I cannot drink beer because it upsets my stomach.

What about the "intangible" advantages? It is mainly in my relationship to the English language that I find a curious change, a certain kind of revulsion at the way the language is used in England. During my early days here, walking down Soho, I was appalled when I was hailed by a prostitute with the words, "Want to come home, darling?" and, a little further along, "Want a short time, darling?" Home—and a short time—what ghastly words to associate with going to a harlot! I am sure that if this is the vocabulary of sex there can be no genuine whores in England. My second shock was to hear a middle-class girl of reasonable intelligence describe a weekly picture magazine as a "book." My third was to see a debutante arrive at a party and announce, "I think I'll traipse over and perch on that seat." Mr. Dwight Macdonald reproduced a classic English conversation in an article in *Encounter*. It went: "Is it raining?" "Not really." I have now decided that what I need to protect myself from is the danger of writing *in* English; I want to write English; I want to write *badly in English*.

The Christian spell, my second main source of "intangible" anxiety, is, I now discover, one that was cast by the greatest Christian this age has produced, Gandhi. Influenced by Tolstoy, Gandhi modelled himself closely, as I now see, on the life of Christ. His "miracle," to make salt from sea water the staff of life for India's multitudes, his days of silence, his abandoning the first civil disobedience movement to go into solitary retreat, all these were clearly derived from Christ's manoeuvers. His language was deliberately biblical. And I think the reason why Gandhi terrified Britain was that he used a Christian conscience against a power that was Christian.

Political disillusionment came with the understanding that there was not the slightest shred of charity in the manner in which India was partitioned, and that if power was transferred, for any reason at all, is was because it was too expensive maintaining an Empire.

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Why, then, did I come to England, and why do I stay here? The answer to the first part of this question is straightforward. The archetypal adventurer is Ulysses. There is a parallel to be found in the Indian epic, the Ramayanam. In both these stories the hero is exiled because of a suggestion that within his tribe he is a weak man. The process of going abroad, the physical combat with forces unknown, long periods of isolation, reflection, and discipline, these make a weak man strong. And, finally, the exile returns a hero, ready to bend the long bow and to reveal himself as the strongest of the tribe. In the Ramayanam, Rama is exiled to a forest for fourteen year. His main task is the destruction of the demon king Ravana, who has kidnapped Sita, Rama's wife. Rama does this and returns to his home to claim the throne. The populace rises against Sita who by now has two children. They suspect her of adultery for she remained for a long period in Ravana's custody. It is then that Rama, once weak, reveals his moral fibre, his sense of dedication towards his people. Even though he himself knows the infinite fidelity of his wife he disowns her and his two children in the interests of his people.

The second part of the question concerns a writer's instinct for survival. I must have know intuitively that it is in the nature of British civilization to cherish people like me, homeless orphans. We are looked upon as children of conflict, born in transit, to be pitied. It is assumed that we will eternally remain torn within ourselves but that we can be taught to recognize our duality: the dear octopus of dichotomy never surrenders its victims. For nearly seven years, ever since I came to England, I have lived smugly and comfortably on the borderline, battening on the profits that derive from playing the role of cultural schizophrenic.

And why not? In such a singular position I did not have to go out and woo life. One is endlessly misunderstood, and in terms of literature, misunderstanding pays dividends; in terms of life, misunderstanding provides one with a cloak under which the interior monologue may be conducted without any disturbance from outside. I did not have to endure the daily tyranny of living with one face: instead I could wear two eternally unconverted faces. I did not have to make an effort to walk the tightrope: instead opposing winds conspired to keep me balanced there. To

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be a cultural split-personality is a useful occupation in Europe, where to be harmonious and integrated would be disastrous.

The other reason is fanciful, but nevertheless one which may be proved in time to have some truth in it. Assuming that it is possible to draw the outline of a national image, it is then possible to see a set pattern of love-hate relationships between never-the-twain-shall-meet nations. A few spring readily to mind: American and Japanese (with American interest in the mystique of Zen); French and Arab (with French interest in the mystique of Islam); German and Jew (with German interest in the Jewish myth); British and Indian (with British interest in the mystique of Hinduism). These nation-pairs pass through all phases involved in a marriage, beginning with love and conquest, and then going on to exploitation, responsibility, an attempt at mutual destruction, a desperate anxiety to preserve identity, guilt, reparation; and will perhaps end only with the inevitable failure that must follow all such intense relationships. At any rate these nation-pairs have an exciting time discovering and discarding each other, playing coquettes in turn, going away and coming back, and producing beautiful half-castes. The new order may yet be in the hands of the new bastardy. I see that despite all the tales I will tell when I go back home, despite my cynicism, many Indians will still have to go through the same ordeal. It is an enriching ordeal. It is the source of all creativity.

I have often, in writing, talked of my sense of being a Brahmin. This has been interpreted by many friends, especially by my Indian friends, as a harking back to reactionary days, to communalism, to exclusiveness. This is nonsense. The word Brahmin has no meaning today because it has been given too many meanings, like holy many, performing priest, yogi, mystic, faith healer, a superior caste, etc. This, too, is nonsense. Hinduism, like Judaism, repels many people because it has not been subject to perennial re-definition. I do not use the word Brahmin in any religious or narrow sense. What I hope to do, ultimately, is to re-define the word in a way as to make it seem more real, more a part of our times. The main difficulty in this is that Hinduism seems to be, unlike the life of ancient Greek city-states, a way of life derived from an all-peasant civilization. There were really

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no castes, only crafts. It was, shall we say, a kind of highly organized and more dogmatic guild socialism. It is inevitable, of course, that modern India must industrialize, so that there would be no sense at all in talking of Hinduism today as a composite way of life for a nation. It is possible, however, that one of the ancient *crafts* may survive, the *craft* of being a Brahmin. This hope is based on the attitude of the Brahmin not to derive any profit from his work, his austerity, his aptitude for rigorous living, his sense of greater responsibility to the community. I mean the word Brahmin to stand for the most imaginative kind of living I know; I use it to indicate the function of an artist in Indian society.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS AFTER THE MODERN POETRY LECTURE

Um-m, yes. Yes, it's obscure
to you, poor boor (and to poor

me). Yet where, where in the macro-circus
is there any bright thing, or dark, cross-purposed

any the less? And again, say, why
of all poor beasts, should boor-you and boor-I

be the only ones, ever, absolutely
sure that the bright or dark we think we see

is there, absolutely? Let's live
terribly dangerously. For if

this poor micro-chaos scares us so
what in the world will we ever dare know?

M. L. Rosenthal

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Lionel Abel

METATHEATER

Jean Genet's extraordinary play, *The Balcony,* is most certainly *not* a piece of avant-garde theater; it is not eccentric or odd; modern, to be sure, it makes no claim to being especially modernistic. The play is neither peculiar nor perverse; yes, *The Balcony* is a new play, but it is not unlike some rather old ones; it is original, but it belongs in a tradition, and that tradition is none other than the great tradition of western dramaturgy. *The Balcony* is a metaplay; and the metaplay has occupied the dramatic imagination of the West to the same degree that the Greek dramatic imagination was occupied with tragedy.

Let it be said once and for all: Shakespeare and Calderón did not write tragedies; at least, they did not write good tragedies. (Shakespeare wrote one great one, *Macbeth*; Calderón, not even one.) What these playwrights did create was a new type of drama, one with very different assumptions from those of Greek tragedy, and with very different effects. Often they produced this characteristic and new form while intent on writing tragedy. But *Hamlet* and *Life is a Dream* are simply not tragedies. They are metaplays.

I have asked myself: can I be the first one to think of designating a form which has been in existence for so long a time, about three hundred years? It is a strange and not undramatic fact of life that something shiningly individual will continue to be seen darkly until it has been given a name.

What, then, is the metaplay?

Let us see first why tragedy was not the characteristic form of the Elizabethan, Spanish or French theater. (It *was* the characteristic form of Jean Racine; but in the seventeenth century he

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was the only playwright who understood the Greek works and knew how to imitate them. Moreover, even Racine, a man as perfectly endowed for writing tragedy as any playwright of any epoch, could only bring off two successful works in this genre; *Berénice* and *Atalie,* and the first of these is not considered altogether tragic, since it terminates with the separation of the lovers, not with their death.) But to return to my question: why have Western dramatists, bent on writing tragedy, been unable to do so successfully? Much of their difficulty can be summed up in a single word: self-consciousness. First, the self-consciousness of the dramatist himself, and then that of his protagonists. For consider: if Antigone were self-conscious enough to suspect her own motives in burying her brother Polynices, would her story be a tragic one? Now the Western playwright is unable to believe in the reality of a character who is lacking in self-consciousness. Lack of self-consciousness is as characteristic of Antigone, Oedipus, and Orestes, as self-consciousness is characteristic of Hamlet, that towering figure of Western metatheater.

Another, insurmountable difficulty: one cannot create tragedy without accepting some implacable values as true. Now the Western imagination has, on the whole, been liberal and skeptical; it has tended to regard *all* implacable values as false.

Let us look for a moment at a typical Western drama which was meant to be a tragedy, seems to be a tragedy, and has, in fact, been so designated. I am referring to Melville's *Billy Budd.* Now in this short novel—it was made into a play by an adapter, and with all its defects, is still the best dramatic work by an American—the young sailor, Budd, accused of mutinous action, but whom the drum court of officers wants to exonerate, is finally sentenced and executed on the insistence of Captain Vere; this is a man whom we have been led to believe appreciates Budd, loves him, and is more convinced of his innocence than any of the other officers. Did Melville then accept as true at least one implacable value: ship discipline on a man-of-war? I do not think so. For why is Melville unable to make Captain Vere's action in demanding Budd's conviction so unconvincing to us, at least to me? I never believed in reading *Billy Budd* that it was necessary for the sailor to hang for discipline on the *Indomitable* to be preserved.

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Moreover, the consciousness of Captain Vere is not expressed in his action, which is simply a mirror reflecting the regulations of the Mutiny Act. Melville was only able to get to the externally tragic ending of his story by depriving Captain Vere, at a crucial moment, of the very kind of self-consciousness he has throughout his work led us to believe Captain Vere possessed. Now for a character not to have self-consciousness is one thing; for a character to be deprived of self-consciousness by the author in order to be capable of representing some implacable value is quite another. Melville, if Captain of the *Indomitable,* would *not* have sentenced Billy Budd to hang. Of course, one can only speculate, but I think Sophocles would have buried his brother in defiance of the State. The Greek playwright's heroine is of the same culture as her creator. So, of course, is Creon, but Captain Vere, at the moment of his dramatic decision, belongs to a world not Melville's. This is one of the superiorities of *Antigone* (it has others) over *Billy Budd.*

But to come back to the metaplay. It is the necessary form for dramatizing characters who, having full self-consciousness, cannot but participate in their own dramatization. Hence the famous lines of Jacques, Shakespeare's philosopher of metatheater, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." The same notion is expressed by Calderón, who entitled one of his works *The Great Stage of the World.* For both the Spanish and the English poet there could not but be an essential illusoriness in reality. We cannot have it both ways: a gain for consciousness means a loss for the reality of its objects, certainly for the reality of its main object, namely the world. Obviously it takes a high degree of consciousness to become aware that the world cannot be proved to exist. However, I shall not insist on this point, for I think the objectivity of the world is maintained not by logic, but, like some fabled treasure which dragons guard, by those monsters to the sensitive and sceptical mind: implacable values. Thus it is that if, in Greek tragedy, the hero is defeated, on the other hand the world of the reality is underscored; in the metaplay, the hero, however unfortunate, can never be decisively defeated, perhaps he can never even be heroic (as Kleist's wonderful the *Prince of Homburg* suggests); but on the other hand, the

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reality of the world is mortally affected, illusion becomes inseparable from reality. *Life is a Dream* is the title of Calderón's greatest play, and Shakespeare's theater terminates with the famous: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on." The point I am making here is that these phrases are not chance expressions by Calderón and Shakespeare, but fundamental concepts of the dramatic form which they initiated.

In the metaplay there will always be a fantastic element. For in this kind of play fantasy is essential, it is what one finds at the heart of reality. In fact, one could say that the metaplay is to ordinary fantasy as tragedy is to melodrama. As in tragedy the misfortunes of the hero must be necessary and not accidental, so in the metaplay life *must* be a dream and the *world* must be a stage.

All this would have by now been much clearer if it had not been for the appearance in the nineteenth century of a very great dramatist, Henrik Ibsen, who tried to give to the realistic play a necessitarian structure like that found in Greek tragedy, and this without sharing the premises of either Sophocles or Aeschylus, Ibsen's own view of the world being actually closer to Shakespeare's and Calderón's. As a result, a wrong belief was propagated—it dominated the stage for more than fifty years—that without the Greek metaphysic the form of tragedy was possible and valid. Now if this view was never formally challenged, its inadequacy was felt by the best playwrights of the present century. Their plays, in the main, are metaplays. Among them is Jean Genet.

II

The Balcony is a brothel whose clients arrived equipped, in Madame Irma's phrase, "each with his own scenario." Surely this identifies the drama as a metaplay. Among the clients are three more or less nondescript persons, one of whom wants to dramatize himself as a bishop, one as a judge, one as a general. The prostitutes assigned to these men play up their illusions of greatness, degrading them in certain instances, just to make the act seem more real. The Grand Balcony is, indeed, "a palace of illusions." For the clients are fitted out with costumes appropriate

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to their dreams. We watch them don these costumes as they prepare for peculiar satisfactions. It is to be noted that in watching them change before our eyes from their uncostumed reality to the bravura figures they become when arrayed to act, we get an altogether new feeling of the reality—not of character—but of costume. Seldom does it happen in any play, modern or classical, that costume means much to the audience. In most revivals of Elizabethan dramas, costume is actually an impediment to our acceptance of the situation or the scene. Hence directors have experimented with doing the old plays in modern dress. But there is something poetical in costume as such, and the theatre would be disadvantaged by a complete loss of it. In *The Balcony,* Genet has done nothing less than restore the poetical value of costume to the stage. For the fact is that when we see costumes being put on, we can accept them as the necessary garb for the characters, *whereas if the characters come on the stage fully costumed, we* think at once of the work of the director and the costume designer. The effect Genet achieves here by the metatheatrical device of having us present at the dressing up of his personages is akin to certain characteristic effects of Pirandello. I am thinking, for example, of the scene in *Tonight We Improvise,* in which an old man rehearses his death-scene; here Pirandello is able to touch us with the feeling of the real imminence of death in a way he never would have been able to do by showing us a man really dying. We tend to think of real blood on the stage as a fake; now the magic of metatheater can make stage blood seem real; at least we can think of it as real for a moment and without feeling that we have been taken in.

Outside the brothel a revolution is taking place. In a remarkable scene, cut, I understand, from the version of *The Balcony* now running in The Circle in the Square, the revolutionaries discuss a bit of theater designed to impose their aims on the populace. Should they not make of Chantal, a prostitute from Madame Irma's "Palace of Illusions" a saint of their revolution? If they were to kill her and claim that she fell as a martyr to their cause, would not her image impell the people to victory? But what good is our victory if come by that way, protests one of the revolutionaries, "it already has a dose of clap." The point is

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made that the revolutionaries must make a determined effort to do without illusion. Perhaps they can. "Have they jumped into reality?" asks the Police Chief from his headquarters in Madame Irma's brothel. Evidently the real adversary of the revolution is none other than Madame Irma. Moreover, she has already conquered. The revolutionaries will not be able to remain real; what is more, they do not want to. They may conquer the palace, the legislature, the army, the courts; they will not be able to control the old whorehouses.

It is the revolutionaries in Genet's play who represent implacable values. Actually, in the modern world, only revolutionaries have been able to represent such values. Hence, the prestige of revolutionaries. But Genet has taken their measure too and finally renders them ridiculous. We have the impression that they will all come finally to Madame Irma's Balcony. They are would-be tragedians in the world of metatheater.

Yet in a way Genet shares the weakness of his revolutionaries in *The Balcony*; he too would like to create something other than the kind of play he can make so magnificently; this master of the metaplay would like to create tragedy. And the sentimental inclination toward something impossible for him is responsible, I believe, for the one bad scene in *The Balcony,* a scene almost fatal to the second half of the play, lasting for almost an hour and boring from beginning to end. Having absorbed the revolution with its insistence on reality into the illusionist world of The Great Balcony, Genet suddenly reverses himself and tries to see illusion itself as inexorable. But this is an impossible idea, contrary to all dramatic judgment or good sense: it may be our fate to have illusions; this does not mean that illusion can have the same force as fate. Or to put the matter better, fate might free us from illusions, but is probably itself illusory. This is more or less what Genet has said throughout his play, but at the very end he seems to want to say the contrary. I noted this weakness in another play of his, *The Maids.* It was not necessary for one of the two girls actually to take poison in that work, since when she did I felt that she was acting. There is something similar in *The Balcony* at the very close. The Chief of Police wants to be apotheosized and as a phallus. He achieves this gandiose aim when a client, (none other

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than the very revolutionary who had wanted to keep the revolution real) pretending to be the Chief of Police, castrates himself. The episode is brutal, vulgar and utterly undramatic. Should illusion also have sacrifices, martyrs? I explain the weak thinking here as not peculiar to Genet but present in modern intellectuals. They are afraid of the implications of their own ideas, which have rendered the world less real than they would like it to be. They do not want to think of life as a dream, but as serious, valid, overwhelming maybe. They would like nothing better than to come upon some implacable value they could regard as true. So the one real fault in Genet's play is not just his. We all have some share in it. Yet, in the main, the point of view of Genet is that the destruction of illusion, as represented by *The Balcony,* would be the destruction of life as such. Is this thought shocking? Some of the reviewers evidently thought so. But is the French dramatist's view really so different from that expressed by Prospero at the conclusion of *The Tempest?* If anything, I should say that Genet's play ends less cynically than Shakespeare's. For Genet the revels have not ended. The action will continue. The more or less humble characters will again mount on stilts and costume themselves to be again extravagant in sex. Illusion and reality cannot be segregated; they will continually change places, and be the Same to the Other, the Other to the Same.

My contention is that the dramatic philosophy of *The Balcony,* as of Genet's *The Maids,* and of his new play, *The Blacks,* while certainly his own, is yet, when we think of it formally, the same dramatic philosophy present in *Twelfth Night, Measure for Measure, Hamlet, The Tempest, Life is a Dream.* Let none then reproach Jean Genet for his ideas. His thought proceeds on a level where one can only think what has to be thought. Without tragedy, of which we may be incapable, there is no philosophic alternative to the two concepts by which I have defined the metaplay: the world is a stage, life is a dream.

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BERLIN LETTER

THE NEW GERMANY

The city looks toward the summit conference in May with feelings of fatalism and apprehension. Since the end of the blockade more than ten years ago, the people of Berlin have lived in limbo, neither damned nor saved, constantly protected and constantly threatened. It is difficult to imagine that this situation might change. The final lines of Rilke's poem "Requiem" could serve as a motto for the town: *"Uberstehen ist alles"* — mere survival is all we can hope for. At present the Berliners are surviving Khrushchev's most recent threat; it was made nearly a year and half ago. The ultimatum has been withdrawn, but the threat remains. Until now, to be sure, it has brought forth not only many expressions of loyalty and assistance but, oddly enough, an economic upswing; more orders, more production, more tourists, more reconstruction. It was of course only a verbal threat and is as yet without practical consequences; but this city has understood once again how to make use of adverse circumstances and to contravene the hard logic of events with a consistency that has enabled it to draw strength and accelerated recovery from this very contravention and adversity.

Both reconstruction and planned modernization proceed apace. The last skyscrapers stand completed in the "City of Tomorrow,"—a destroyed city quarter that has been altogether razed and rebuilt as a new residential section, complete with churches, a library, movie theaters, stores, and cafes, designed by some of the world's leading architects. Along with German architects, such men as Gropius, Vago, Niemeyer, Avar Aalto, Stubbins, and—at some distance, because of the size of his structure—Le Corbusier have represented here their conceptions of modern living. Financed by the Federal Republic, and including a large-scale traffic network with a municipal freeway, new subway lines, public edifices, a new

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opera house, and a concert hall for the Berlin Philharmonic, the building project, "Capital Berlin," continues. A new, very modern city, its dimensions and facilities tailor-made for the future capital of a reunited Germany, arises, even as re-unification and the possibility of Berlin functioning as a capital grow increasingly complicated and remote. At the same time, East Berlin also discusses plans for remodeling the old city center in the Eastern Sector.

West Berlin is planning and building from the simple instinct of self-preservation. To stand still would mean to give up. It creates buildings and monuments in order to create symbols and thereby, perhaps, even facts; it hopes that concrete structures will some day be more effective than imponderable wishes in convincing the world, and perhaps even the Germans, that two separate members belong together because the head already exists. Viewed in this light, Berlin is the manifestation of an irrational and, judged by topical logic, illogical historic impulse. It does, of course, owe the means for its reconstruction to favorable political circumstances produced by its very difficulties: to the aid and backing of the United States, to the good will and the bad conscience of the Federal Republic, and to a certain make-believe as regards re-unification. But the drive and the energy the city reveals in planning and mobilizing the means to carry out the plans—those are its own.

Berlin's most remarkable quality may be the inordinate measure of loyalty and sentimental attachment it generates among its citizens. In the first, most dangerous months after Khrushchev's threats, the number of departures for the West rose above average, but not by much, and it was smaller than the number of returns to Berlin during the same period. What is behind this loyalty? I would like to suggest that it is the paradoxical result of hard times, of ordeals survived—and still to be survived—together. These have molded the special mentality of Berlin into an even more specific attitude toward existence—shared, incidentally, with certain modifications, by all social groups, whatever their educational level may be. It harmoniously combines such conflicting emotions as hope and skepticism, seriousness and a sense of the grotesque in this seriousness. The darkest pessimism can yield profound satisfaction to the Berliner if he encounters the same pessimism among his friends, in the neighborhood saloon, in the street, or in a cabaret—

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and if it is seasoned, perhaps, with more acute wit and more daring metaphors.

Metropolitan man, says a modern myth, is rootless. But the man who almost perished with his city, and who then laboriously but successfuly survived with it, is clearly not rootless. The Berliner is connected with his city because he derives a personal importance and distinction from his share in its fate and troubles and also, of course, from his part in its resurrection from rubble and ruins. The fact that Berlin is not a city in the usual amorphous sense of the word, but a city-state with well-defined frontiers and its own government consolidates this sense of belonging. There is really only one class, the mobile class of the writers, which (with some praiseworthy exceptions such as Brecht and Benn, both dead now) has secretly but conspicuously decamped from Berlin—though in the last few weeks three important writers—Günter Grass, Max Frisch, and Ingeborg Bachmann—have decided to move to Berlin. Another of the few promising writers loyal to Berlin is Wolfdietrich Schnurre, the poet and satirist whose surrealistically distorted "chronicle," *The Fate of Our City,* was published this fall.

So, with cultural life here essentially devoid of local literary production, the center of gravity has shifted to the theater and to music. Here, too, many of the active impulses seem to be connected with a kind of sublimated instinct of self-preservation: one wants to maintain a tradition which has become legendary, the tradition of the Mad, Golden Twenties that are constantly used as a spur and held up as a standard of value. To stop emulating the twenties would mean artistic surrender. Today it goes without saying that the high level of achievement of those hectic and creatively explosive years is reached by only a fraction: no more than two or three per cent in the literary field, but possibly some thirty per cent in the theater. Which is a great deal, for according to the participants, now scattered all over the globe, such an abundance of exciting theater has never again been achieved anywhere. Some of the mainstays of those days have returned: Fritz Kortner—whose memoirs, set in Vienna, Berlin, and New York, have just been published—staged a brilliant production of *The Robbers* which turned out to be a stirring analysis of evil, for the Schiller bicentennial. And Elisabeth Bergner, directed by Jerome Kilty in his

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dramatization of Shaw's letters, was wildly cheered as Mrs. Patrick Campbell.

This winter's current productions offer the latest in international playwriting. Besides a veritable Giraudoux renaissance (*Undine, Tiger at the Gates, The Madwoman of Chaillot*) we have Jean Genet's *The Balcony,* Anouilh's latest, rather feeble *L'Hurluberlu,* Osborne's *The Entertainer* and his earlier *Epitaph for George Dillon,* Willis Hall's *The Long and the Short and the Tall,* Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey,* the world premiere of Ezra Pound's *Women of Trachis* in a production that could not quite bridge the gap between Antiquity and modern slang, and Tennessee Williams' psychopathic thriller, *Sweet Bird of Youth,* a failure with reviewers and public alike. At the other extreme, Edward Albee, a young, relatively unknown American, made a notable and well-deserved success with his one-act play, *The Zoo Story,* first performed with Beckett's monologue, *Texte pour rien,* on the new Studio Stage of the Municipal Theaters.

The most impressive theatrical event of the season, however, was a performance at the West Berlin City Opera of Arnold Schoenberg's unfinished and supposedly all but unperformable opera, *Moses and Aaron.* Like the presentation of almost all the above-mentioned moderns (including that of Genet's *Balcony*), this was undertaken by a municipally subsidized theater: the sum required for an initial run of eight performances is in absurd excess of the box office receipts for those eight showings. Next spring, however, before going to Paris, there will be further performances of the opera; for since the opening—which was disrupted in the second scene by organized and determined enemies of Schoenberg and the new music—this extremely difficult work has become an undefinable sort of hit. Is this because of the music, or the extraordinary performance? Twelve-tone experts regard this Schoenberg opera, which was originally written as an oratorio, as one of the most important, if not the most important musical event of the twentieth century. The receptive layman with an ear for contemporary music, responds (in the magnificent third scene, "Ghetto in Egypt," if nowhere else) at least to a sense of a consistent and autonomous musical world, even if he can not surely grasp the full import of this musical revolution.

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Schoenberg's subject is tremendous: it is the conflict between pure and symbolic thinking, idea and image, spirit and magic, represented by Moses and Aaron. Moses, as Schoenberg boldly interprets the Second Book of Moses, has received the revelation of an unimaginable God, yet he can communicate it only with Aaron's help. Aaron, however, can only convey this abstract message in terms of images which represent for Schoenberg a relapse into the archaic, a virtual Fall from Grace—and must even resort to miracles to convince his people. Nevertheless, the people return to their orgiastic idolatry, and Aaron, accused by Moses, dies after persuading them once more to reform their religious habits and beliefs. Schoenberg makes the contrast between Moses, the abstract thinker, and Aaron, the imaginative thinker, radically clear by having Moses speak and Aaron sing—indicating, perhaps involuntarily, that in the final analysis his and Moses' ideal of non-imaginative thinking is a principle that tends to destroy art. Singing choruses are used side by side with rhythmically, indeed even tonally, fixed speaking choruses of such extraordinary difficulty that for the Berlin performance they were recorded on tape and reproduced electronically.

The performance of *Moses and Aaron* may well have been so impressive and exciting precisely because of the immense problems that exist both in dramatically representing actual thought and in the representational media with which it wrestled, and wrestled successfully—making the listener feel a participant in the creative realization of a bold work of art. Beyond the problem of an abstract God, it thus became the artistic equivalent of our enormously complex world—the very thing which modern artists try to express but hardly ever succeed in expressing intentionally. At bottom, Schoenberg did not quite achieve the dramatic realization of his true subject either, but what he did achieve is important enough, and on this occasion it was brought to the stage by kindred spirits. Hermann Scherchen conducted; Rudolf Sellner, one of the most gifted Germans in this field, directed, and the sets and costumes of Michel Raffaelli, a student of Picasso, seemed nothing short of genius in their modernity.

In all this wealth of modern theater the absence of young German dramatists is particularly striking. Kaiser, Sternheim, and

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Ernst Barlach are performed, but then they are virtually ancients. The one exception is Brecht, still almost contemporary and played in East Berlin, by his Berlin Ensemble, in exemplary, authentic productions, still based in part on Brecht's originals. After his death, the Berlin Ensemble staged his satire, *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui,*—Ui being a blend of Hitler and Al Capone—in disturbingly impressive fashion. Other German-speaking exceptions are the Swiss writers, Duerrenmatt and Max Frisch, but neither East nor West Germany has provided the many promoters with a new dramatist. And this is a country that is so fond of the theater and so full of theaters, in a country whose every city has one or more publicly subsidized stages virtually crying out for plays! True, we are not living in a heyday of German literature, but several respectable novels and volumes of poetry have been published since the war—and yet, there is no play that is worth discussing except *Outside the Door* by Wolfgang Borchert who died, still young, in 1947. The fact is that Germany not only has no good playwrights, but unlike America, she has not even effective ones.

What are the reasons? Probably not only the psychological passivity and inhibitedness of modern man—which Beckett, Ionesco, and Adamov have shown to be by no means lacking in dramatic material. Instinctive dramatic talents (Brecht was the last example) rarely bother with subtle psychological insights, and even more rarely with the latest discoveries of academic psychology. Great playwrights have gotten along with run-of-the-mill psychology, while ersatz playwrights mull over psychoanalytical case histories.

Here I would like to introduce a very simple idea into the discussion of modern drama, or the lack of it: that the elementary endowment of a dramatist must contain some indispensable dose of opinion, opinion about the nature of man, his destiny, and his fate. All of this sounds very humdrum, but it includes the courage to make fundamental choices of principle: is man strong or weak, free or predestined, good, bad, or both? Sophocles believed that man was strong—"Nothing is mightier than man"; and *hybris,* the sin of Greek heroes, is an offense of strength. Brecht thought of man as "not smart enough for this life"—to him, man is weak, a poor wretch; when he is on top, he kicks others; when he is down, he gets kicked. Beckett thinks that man is done for, and dramatizes

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this discovery. Unless I misunderstand Mr. Gore Vidal and his witty philippic against "too much love" and "democracy, which is too much with us," in last fall's issue of *Partisan Review,* his prescription for American drama is less love and more blows, truth rather than wishful thinking. In our countries, the collapse of ideologies—in themselves very inadequate substitutes for opinion—has made people afraid to judge. One can write novels, especially of the non-naturalistic variety, without coming to a fundamental decision about man, but if you put him on stage as an active character, you must know about him and judge him. A dread of such judgments seems to prevail in democratic as well as in post-totalitarian society. In the first, you dare, at most, to put yourself above your neighbor financially, but not in intelligence and judgment; in the second, the experience of man's being enmeshed in the wheels of an evil state machinery makes it difficult to come to a decision about human nature.

But drama is a judgment of man, and the German drama in particular is still governed by Schiller's dictum that the stage is "a moral institution." In this sense, the obscene and blasphemous Jean Genet is not only a true dramatist but a true moralist, albeit an infernally black one. He is not playing the coy parlor game of *épater les bourgeois*; he condemns man with the wrath of a Puritan preacher of perdition. Man is evil, and his so-called morality, along with its derivative institutions—church, justice, state, army—is a mere pretext for satisfying his base and sadistic lusts; the whole world is a whorehouse. Incidentally, Genet is also a strange fellow traveler of Puritanism in his desire to unmask the solemn symbols by which man seeks to prove the sanctity of church, law, and state to himself.

It is amazing that Germany, after Nazism and war, has brought forth no dramatist who wants to show us that man is evil. A few well-meaning plays have been written about this period, but their characters seem rather like puppets. Not one of the resistance plays completely avoids the danger of degenerating into a political crime thriller along the old cops-and-robbers line. At last, however, an extraordinary war film has been brought off. Bernhard Wicki, known from Käutner's *The Last Bridge,* has, in his debut as a director, used a cast of young amateurs. His film, *The*

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Bridge, deals with the last crime of the war, the mobilization of 17-year-old children for a war that was already lost. Seven boys defend their village bridge, due to be blown up anyway, against advancing American tanks. They are, and this is the achievement of the picture—not only seduced victims but active characters whose picture—not only seduced victims but active characters whose juvenile incomprehension and presumption makes them guilty and brings them and their village to a terrible end.

Another problem for both drama and novel is that in a deeper sense there is no society as a breeding ground for literature. There are only these two provisional societies, each claiming the whole without being able to enforce its claims, and therefore tending willy-nilly to go it alone. Where, then, is the writer to locate his characters and their fate? Which of these two societies provides his standards? Among the new fall publications this dilemma has, in different ways, found virtually symbolic expression. Two novels about the recent past have appeared, both written by women of the older generation, one in the East and one in the West. Anna Seghers' new novel, *The Decision,* her first after a long silence, takes place after the war, partly in the Eastern Zone, partly in West Germany. The people in the East are workers and good; those in the West are factory owners, engineers, schemers, and bad. Anna Seghers can still tell a tight and graphic story, but her judgment of men has been corrupted. The Western writer is Ina Seidel, descended from a family of writers and widely read as an author of voluminous educational novels of a Protestant-humanist tendency. She would probably be shocked to hear that in her new novel, *Michaela,* the protagonists belonging to her educated bourgeoisie—a doctor, a historian, a Swiss-German general's daughter, a Jewish archaeologist—are all good, while the few plain people in the book are dubious characters or downright bad. Nor can Ina Seidel grasp the perfidious dynamics of the time of 1930 to 1945. As Frau Seghers has been corrupted by too much politics and doctrine, Frau Seidel's idealistic upbringing has cut her off from political reality. She is the representative of a German cultural type whose aversion to the dirty business of politics strengthened the very forces responsible for the time of 1933 to 1945.

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But the work of Ina Seidel, even though it is still widely admired, is no longer typical of the contemporary German novel. This was not a bad year. Heinrich Böll wrote a new novel that delighted many critics but strikes me as being hindered by a slightly obtrusive symbolism: it concerns three generations of a Rhenish family of architects who build, then blow up, and finally rebuild an abbey. Worthier of notice are two newcomers of promising talents. Günter Grass, a 32-year-old lyricist of German-Polish extraction, has written a picaresque novel; reviewers compared it to Grimmelshausen's *Simplizissimus,* or even to Rabelais, but it reminds one, more fittingly perhaps, of Saul Bellow's Augie March. To be sure, the hero is more comical even than Augie March. At the tender age of three Otto Matzerath gets a tin drum as a present and decides to stop growing. With the craftiness and the unscrupulousness of a child, Otto drums his way through an age that is just as infantile and as unprincipled as he is. The novel is widely read and much praised and is provocative enough to startle many worthy citizens. It was nominated for the annual literary prize of Bremen, but the city senate reconsidered and voted it down. The senators were probbably more shocked by the apparent blasphemy of the story than by its latitudinarian attitude toward sex. During a visit to a Catholic church in his native Danzig, Otto falls in love with a nude plaster statue of the Christ child. This bold friendship with erotic overtones is a leitmotif of the work and as a kind of provocative counterpoint it satirizes a widespread religious sentimentality. Grass's *Blechtrommel* might be compared with Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*; the two novels are perhaps the most significant post-war Germany has produced. They try to chronicle and to interpret what really happened in Germany during the last fifty years. Of course, the methods employed are radically different. Thomas Mann's descriptions are the work of a sharply analytical mind; Grass relies exclusively on his imagination. It is a highly original kind of imagination that never strays beyond its proper bailiwick. Grass does not have recourse to those artistic tricks of modern literature that are sometimes taken for imagination, while actually they are the expression of intellectual capriciousness. The "Tin Drum" cannot be interpreted as an ordinary novel with symbolic intent, for the author rarely aims for a deliberate meaning. He seems to

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find meaning and significance most often when he gives free rein to his imagination.

Uwe Johnson, the other newcomer on the literary scene, is an East German who has lived in West Berlin for several months. His West German publisher Suhrkamp was unwilling to market his novel *Conjectures on Jacob* (*Mutmassungen über Jakob*) under a pseudonym. Uwe attended an East German university and in addition busied himself with the study of the symbolic significance of the signal box at a railroad station; both activities are reflected in this astonishing first novel by a 25-year-old writer who is quite obviously influenced by Faulkner, too much influence, one might say, for characters and events are slightly over-obscured by a narrative technique of Faulknerian discontinuity. But at the same time Johnson has represented the daily life, the feeling of life, the moral problems—in short, human existence—in the East more accurately than anyone else before. In this book, the estrangement of the two parts of Germany and its people, the secret, dangerous, forbidden character of their encounters, is shrouded in the hopeless gloom which political reality casts over the life of the individual. Jacob's death in shunting trains remains unexplained; and conjecture—was it accident, liquidation, or half-voluntary suicide?—leads to no solution.

Ursula Brumm

(*Translated from the German by E. B. Ashton*)

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LONDON LETTER

THE NEW BRITISH LEFT

I wish I knew enough about Britain to be able to say with any confidence what is really happening here. The difficulty, as usual, is that too much is being said by too few people. The English literary world is supposed to have broken up since the war, but I know of at least some efficient if shallow channels, along which the best opinion of the time is supposed to flow, and I know one or two places where you can sit and watch it flowing. As I hardly ever do this, though, I can't be certain that I know what is supposed to be going on. I could, like somebody living outside Britain, get my sense of movement from print, but apart from the fact that this is always likely to be misleading—circulation still follows capital, and capital ownership in Britain is still certainly unrepresentative—I find that even the little I know about cultural groups here modifies the value of the evidence to such an extent that any plain reading is difficult. I get most of my evidence from discussions with audiences to whom I lecture, and from what can be generalized from the indisputable public facts.

I think the essential factor in any reading of contemporary British opinion is one of generation. If the average age of contributors were printed on newspapers and journals, it would clarify many things. It is important, for example, that the *Guardian* (which used to be the *Manchester Guardian*) seems now to be mainly run by youngish men, and I know when I read its book page I find it nearer, in tone and opinion, to people I actually meet than any other British paper. The *Spectator,* also, seems to belong to this generation. In other papers and magazines, few are untouched by the manner and opinions of the generation now under forty, but the mixture takes place in different ways, from modification to absorption. The *New Statesman* seems to fluctuate

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—still mainly the valuable organ of the older Left Establishment, but sometimes including the thinking and feeling of the younger Left, sometimes reviving, in spectacular ways, the features which drove this younger Left away from it. The *Observer* has a settled if filleted mixture of the most improbable page-fellows, but manages to look pretty young and radical (it certainly isn't the latter) beside the monumentally aged *Sunday Times*. In several of the best periodicals there is a characteristic contemporary tone, which ought to be relevant evidence, but that particular flavor, compounded of London and international contacts, seems oddly to have very little to do with Britain, at least the Britain I am interested in. I watch people I have known disappearing into that world, and there it is. I get an occasional message back that I am insular (it used to be "provincial" but too many writers in demand now live in the provinces), and I interpret this as meaning that I route my international contacts other than through London, and also that I have as many friends in the Soviet Union as in the United States, which is not at all a civilised and cosmopolitan thing to do. But also I am frankly insular in the sense that I am primarily interested in British society and in what manages to get culturally expressed of *that,* and Port Talbot and Manchester and places like that seem to me more really productive of evidence.

Anyway, through these cross-currents, the difference between generations still emerges quite strongly, and everyone under forty believes the tide is flowing his way. But what way? In politics, for example, there are two important young groups: the Bow Group of Conservatives, who are interestingly liberal on colonial matters in ways that have little to do with solid Conservative opinion, and the New Left, which I think I belong to myself. It may be that British politics in fifteen or twenty years will consist of the conflict now existing between these two new approaches, but a lot can happen to start other directions. Broadly, the Bow Group seems to be the expression of a progressive pragmatism within the terms of the existing society: easier and more open about class, tired of the old Imperialism but rather liking the new, full of appetite for a fast-moving and affluent commercial society. To get any fair account of it you would have to ask one of its people; what I have seen and heard of it is pretty mixed,

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and there may be some organizing principle, other than that of decorous modernizing adjustment to small-power capitalism, that has escaped me. Meanwhile I could try to give some account of the New Left, from my own bias, and see what you make of it.

After long discussion, two independent journals—the *New Reasoner* and the *Universities and Left Review*—joined forces recently to produce the *New Left Review,* which is to come out six times a year. Typographically it may not be very clear, but the emphasis is a review of the New Left not a new Left Review; reference back to the *Left Review* of the 1930's is not intended. The two original periodicals had very different beginnings. The *New Reasoner* succeeded the *Reasoner,* which began as an opposition journal inside the British Communist Party. Its editors originally were Edward Thompson and John Saville, from Halifax and Hull respectively. John Saville is an economic historian; Edward Thompson has written a long and excellent book on William Morris—a combination of history and literary criticism. Thompson and Saville came to defining Stalinism as a distortion of communism. The breaking point came with their support of the Hungarian Revolution, but it seems this was only the climax of a longer history of democratic opposition. Many British intellectuals came out of the Communist Party at about that time, and energies that had been locked up in the apparatus soon invigorated the traditional non-Communist Labour Left. At the same time, the non-Communist Labour Left has long seemed uncomfortable resting-ground for intellectuals. Theoretically very weak, it made up in good-heartedness what it lacked in social theory, but was still subject to a jerky emotional opportunism, characteristically expressed by powerful leader-figures like Aneurin Bevan. Bevan's apparent desertion of the Left in 1958 on the issue of Britain's hydrogen bomb exposed this weakness and dependence dramatically. Meanwhile thinkers on the right of the Labour Party, especially C. A. R. Crosland, won easy if hollow victories, with the Labour Left theoretically impoverished.

The *New Reasoner* marked the reorganization of democratic socialist theory in Britain, and the wonder to me is that the people who wrote for it could have stayed in the Communist Party for so long. The question really was one of alternatives.

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If you were really interested in socialism, where could you work for it in Britain, with the official Labour Party steadily slipping away from it, and with the Labour Left in the condition described? Moreover, it must be said quite clearly that the long parade of ex-communist recanters was so truly miserable to watch, seemed so obviously not just a political change but a collapse of feeling and hope, that the incentive to stay attached was probably strengthened in many of the best men. I can only speak from the experience of several old personal friends, who hung on to their Communist cards through an increasingly bitter disillusion but hung on because, with the alternatives as they were, it seemed a test of plain human strength. I know no better people in postwar Britain than these, though I could not share their actual loyalties. If communists or ex-communists are suspect because they are not natural democrats, I can only say that I find men like Edward Thompson the real democratic fighters in a period in which the formal democratic assent was much too often a simple compromise with capitalism and the military alliances. The tension they have been through is, of course, still unresolved. The *New Reasoner,* for me, was still much too involved in arid fights with the Party Marxists, and occasional articles came though in which nothing at all seemed to have changed. But also there were signs of socialist *thinking* again, in the terms of actual contemporary British life, and that was the valuable strand.

The *Universities and Left Review* was always very different. It started from Oxford, after the Hungary-Suez crisis, and its editors were all new to politics. The eldest, Charles Taylor, a Canadian, was a Fellow of All Souls and a philosopher. The others were recent graduates: Stuart Hall, from Jamaica, in English; Gabriel Pearson in English; Ralph Samuel in politics and economics. The magazine took some time to find an identity, but eventually became the channel of two distinct lines of work: economic description of contemporary British capitalism, *The Insiders* and Michael Barratt-Brown's *The Controllers*; and the cultural analysis—the bringing together of sociology and literary criticism. The former would have tied in easily to the best work of the *New Reasoner;* the latter was a bit more doubtful.

Three books appeared, in these formative stages, that had

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some effect. Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* and my own *Culture and Society* set off some of the cultural analysis in *Universities and Left Review,* but it is clear, looking back, that this would have come through anyway. The fact of cultural poverty is inescapable in contemporary Britain, and Hoggart had very thoroughly documented it. But not all of us were willing to describe this as "mass culture": this is still our main point of difference from American radicals with whom otherwise we have much in common. Hoggart himself seemed uncertain about this, and it was easy to read his book as if the old working-class community feeling was the only alternative to the new classless "mass culture." I disagreed, and argued mainly that certain ways of thinking, including some radical thinking about "the masses," were the sickness of a particular society, and that there was an alternative to these, not so much in the old working-class communities which were in any case breaking up, but in the democratic institutions which, however tarnished, still composed the British labour movement. This argument is not yet resolved, though Hoggart and I have learned from each other and are now rather nearer a common position (one that had been assumed, quite wrongly, much earlier when Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams got to be used like the name of a joint firm). The tying-in of this new strand with the other developments noted is also not complete, but some clarification came with the third book, *Conviction,* a series of essays from a rather different range of authors. Hoggart and I were put page by page with young Labour Party sociologists and economists (Peter Townsend, Peter Shore, Brian Abel-Smith), and on the whole it seemed like a group, though the contributors had never met as such, and in several cases had not met at all. Iris Murdoch's argument for a new effort and emphasis in socialist theory came close to this mood, and to some of the work in the two magazines. It began at last to look as if a new Left existed or was on the edge of forming.

The *New Left Review* was launched in December 1959, and its main job is to continue this search for new common ground, as well as continuing and extending the particular lines of work opened up. The encouraging thing is that it seems already to be something more than a magazine. The *Universities and Left*

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Review had already begun an extremely successful meeting-club, and also a coffee-house, *The Partisan,* in London. In recent months, New Left Clubs have been opening in many places all over Britain, and there are also many *New Left Review* readers' groups meeting regularly in different parts of the country—a form of organization that has not existed in Britain since the Left Book Club groups of the 1930's. Some breadth has also been added by three other developments: the Free Cinema movement (now disbanded as a group but spreading its influence as its directors establish themselves elsewhere); the encouraging revival of plays and novels about areas of ordinary British life which the cultural Establishment had neglected—the obvious names are Arnold Wesker, John Braine, Shelagh Delaney, but there are many others; and, above all, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which is in no way a creation of the New Left, but which, in the wonderfully successful marches from Aldermaston and in scores of crowded meetings, is bringing thousands of young people into politics, but politics of a new and independent kind which the traditional parties are hardly in touch with. It is all a glorious and lively muddle, changing in character continuously, full of serious differences within itself, but recognizable as a social mood absolutely different from that obtaining at the beginning of the 1950's. The main thing is that a good many people under thirty have bypassed or recovered from the real failure of nerve which deadened social and intellectual argument in Britain between 1945 and 1955. If the New Left does its job in the provision of the solid thinking which must succeed its lively evocation of a mood, the general effect could be considerable. A library of socialist books is now being started, which over five years could amount to a new statement of democratic socialist theory and policy in Britain. This could be of some international importance.

What are the relations between the New Left and the Labour Party? Distinctly odd, I think, though most New Left people work in the Labour Party, and some of its emphases have already passed into official Labour policy, particularly on the less minestrewn cultural sector. The fact is that most young socialists and radicals regard the Labour Party as a part of the Establishment they are against and will have to change. The conditions for healthy

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development seem to be: a new grasp of social and cultural poverty in an otherwise prosperous society; a renewal of belief in active participating democracy as the means of reform—neither the State board nor the compromise with powerful private monopolies, but the building of democratic institutions in industry, in the cultural apparatus, and in our heavily bureaucratic communities; an imaginative growth, finally, of a new attitude to international politics which will stop centering relations on military alliances and nuclear armaments. In the next five years, the official Labour Party could well be changed in precisely these ways; if so, it would itself be the New Left. If not, the Labour Party will almost certainly continue to decline. Reformed Conservatism, with the Bow Group as its pilot, will leave hardly any room for the moderate policy on which Labour lost three elections.

The difficult stage is now, when the New Left, pleased by its first successes, might easily sit back and become exactly like the Old Left which it sought to invigorate and clarify. The crucial test it still has to pass is that posed by the many communists who look on it all as little more than a game. Can you create contemporary and effective socialist theory, they ask, without in effect coming back to us? More important, can you do anything with it, even if you have created it, as a miscellaneous group of writers and young people? These are real questions, with no certain answers. Until the New Left makes sense to industrial workers (it is certainly trying to do this now), its potential is severely limited. But we think that all over the world two threads of development have snapped and are useless: Stalinism on the one hand (on issues of power and freedom), simple democratic evolution on the other (we get richer but not more free, and communicate more easily but often at the price of a culture so bad that it can destroy us). Facing our own problems, we find echoes not only from the United States, but from the Soviet Union and Poland. The gradual definition of new problems, the recovery of nerve to face radical change, seem carried to us by many winds.

Or so it seems to me from this crowded island we are trying both to discover and to change. If I am wrong, we shall all know about it, but the effort is pretty exhilarating.

Raymond Williams

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BOOKS

WORDS AND IDEAS

WORDS AND THINGS. By Ernest Gellner. Beacon Press. $4.95.

Mr. Gellner, who as an undergraduate studied philosophy at Oxford, is a lecturer in anthropology at the London School of Economics. His book *Words and Things* attacks the current British Linguistic Philosophy with thoroughness and indeed with savagery. Gellner claims that the method is inherently disingenuous and amounts in the end to an uncritical acceptance of current values and of the trivial vision of the world enshrined in ordinary language.

There has been a great deal of fuss about the book. The fuss began when Professor Ryle refused to review it in *Mind* on the ground that it contained accusations of dishonesty directed against particular named philosophers. Russell, who approves of the book and has written an introduction to it sympathetic to its purposes, then wrote to the *Times* protesting against what he regarded as an unwarranted interference with free discussion.

A very heated controversy followed, in the columns of the *Times* and elsewhere. The author maintained that he had accused the system, not the individuals, of dishonesty, and critics wrote back rejecting his distinction. Numbers of people wrote letters saying that it was about time philosophers stopped playing trivial word-games and returned to their traditional job of discovering important truths relevant to the conduct of life. What was chiefly noteworthy about the fuss was the extreme dislike and suspicion of modern philosophy which was voiced in many quarters once the occasion arose. What was least discussed was the merit of Mr. Gellner's argument.

Mr. Gellner has written an interesting, exasperating, misleading book. A number of questions arise concerning it. Are Mr. Gellner's claims concerning the triviality of Linguistic Philosophy cor-

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rect? Is his account of the genesis of that philosophy correct? What role, if any, does he wish philosophy to play? What, in short, is Mr. Gellner's own game?

Mr. Gellner holds that Linguistic Philosophy rests on two assumptions. One is what he calls "the generalised form of the Naturalistic Fallacy," that is, the inference from the fact that a term is actually used to the conclusion that it is appropriately used. The other is what he calls "polymorphism," the assumption that word usages are so various that general critical assertions concerning concepts are impossible. On this basis, he argues, is erected a fairly unified system, which he calls "camouflaged naturalism," which is designed to paralyze thought and insinuate the view that the concepts embedded in our natural language should be accepted as they are.

Though I do not disagree with everything that Mr. Gellner says, I think that his total argument is wrong. To begin with, Linguistic Philosophy is not the sinister monolithic system which he imagines. What Mr. Gellner has done is ingeniously to invent a system of his own, by a judicious selection of slogans and quotations, which he then attributes to the philosophers he is attacking. It is true that the movement has had its period of fanaticism during which some nonsense was talked. But why should this philosophical movement be the first in history of which this was true? What is rather remarkable is the speed and thoroughness with which the early positions have been revised and refined. Mr. Gellner is aware of this process, and indeed, quotes devastating criticisms by Linguistic Philosophers of many of the positions which he still wishes to regard as part of the "system."

Where Mr. Gellner's argument is at its most plausible is where he speaks of moral and political philosophy. These studies have certainly suffered from following in the wake of a movement whose initial interest lay in other types of problems. In an attempt to bring ethics "into line," arguments from actual to valid use have been employed by philosophers who attempted to uncover moral categories by examining the function of moral terms in ordinary language.

This procedure results, as Mr. Gellner rightly points out, in the "discovery" of what is simple and average rather than of what

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is important or fundamental; and it can well be that arguments of this type in morals and politics have discouraged some kinds of free inquiry and of philosophical inventiveness. However, as Mr. Gellner himself points out, philosophers are already becoming critical of this line of thought; and recent work in ethics (Stuart Hampshire's "Thought and Action," for instance) is markedly less "naturalistic." So that even here I think that Mr. Gellner is construing a temporary phase as a fundamental position.

If we turn to other regions of philosophy Mr. Gellner's view is still less convincing. Mr. Gellner states that Linguistic Philosophy has not solved any major philosophical problem. It is a little early to say this. The extremely difficult work of Wittgenstein, so far from providing a facile technique, has not yet been properly studied and assimilated, and it will be some time before it becomes clear exactly what sort of philosophy is to emerge from this disturbed time. However, Linguistic Philosophy has, even by now, it seems to me, enormously clarified the issues in many fields of logic and of epistemology, where it *has* advanced, and *has* solved problems, although these fields remain places of hot dispute.

Moreover it is not the case here that Linguistic Philosophy is the simple-minded naturalism uncritically accepting ordinary language, which Mr. Gellner pictures. It is an extremely Kantian philosophy. It searches in language for structures of thought about which philosophical problems congregate. How permanent and how fundamental these structures are is something which Linguistic Philosophy also investigates; nor does it, in doing so, always avoid making *general* critical judgments on concepts currently in use. Such general judgments, often of a highly polemical kind, have been made, for instance, in ethics, in relation to the content of theological discourse, and in the theory of mind. What after all is Professor Ryle's "Concept of Mind" but a critical survey of *mistakes* concerning the mind which are embedded in the structure of language? Whether or not one agrees with these general judgments, there is little substance in Mr. Gellner's view that Linguistic Philosophy "teaches" that everything is as it seems.

What, after all, is Mr. Gellner's own game? In a passage in which he seems disposed to defend Russell's Theory of Descriptions he speaks of Russellian empiricism as "legitimate" and "un-

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misleading." Later he speaks of this empiricism as based on "one or two misunderstandings—the view that there is a rigid logical skeleton underlying our discourse, and the theory that our knowledge is literally built up from little atoms." But, he asks, "how many people have seriously suffered from these misunderstandings?" To speak in this way seems to be an abandonment of philosophy; and I suspect that Mr. Gellner, who twice uses the phrase "the sterility of philosophy" in speaking of past, not present philosophy, is ready to jettison the whole business in favor of science, helped out perhaps by a certain amount of moralizing pragmatism.

This seems to me, if it is Mr. Gellner's attitude, to be a dangerous one, especially when it is accompanied by attacks upon the alleged irresponsibility of people with a classical education who are too lazy to mug up mathematics in middle age. Mr. Gellner's book would have been more useful if he had been prepared to show his hand, and not to conclude with vague generalizations about philosophy as being properly "basic thought" and "evaluation," which in the context read like lip service paid to a notion which he really rejects.

Critics of modern philosophy often fail to notice that in separating its disciplines from those of science and in rejecting certain metaphysical types of explanation, philosophy has made a substantial move in the direction of truth. It is, of course, a move which has landed it in a state of confusion. But concerning fundamental issues confusion is not new. (Mr. Gellner accuses modern philosophers of reversing Plato's procedure and of leading people back into the Cave. When, I wonder, were we ever out of the Cave?)

But this much at least seems clear, that philosophy has and should have, in a free society, three important roles: that of attempting to solve characteristically philosophical problems, many of them old ones; that of providing a critical running commentary on the concepts used by other groups of persons, including scientists (and especially in the "humane" sciences); and that of *inventing,* especially in the moral and political sphere, new types of explanatory concept. Linguistic Philosophy has so far been more concerned with the first two tasks; the third task must in a scientific

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age and with new empiricist assumptions be engaged in with a difference. After the first and more destructive phase of modern empiricism, this activity will doubtless find its right place in philosophy once more.

If Mr. Gellner's main complaint had concerned the failure of this sort of creativeness I should have felt more sympathy. He has however preferred to attack modern philosophy as a whole. It is just that any living philosophical tradition is likely to be better than none, since philosophy is an intensely traditional subject. It is also that this tradition is a good one, the legitimate heir of an older British empiricism, and is at present in an extremely lively and interesting state of change. When it is at last agreed that philosophy is a waste of time we shall indeed be stuck in the Cave.

Iris Murdoch

HOW IT STRIKES A COMPATRIOT

THE GLITTERING COFFIN. By Dennis Potter. Victor Gollancz. 18s.

In *The Glittering Coffin* Mr. Dennis Potter, a young working-class undergraduate just down from Oxford, raises a voice of genuine social protest. Unfortunately he accompanies it with so much rant and rhetoric that he virtually drowns his own words. It seems to me dubious whether the few scraps of coherent sense that are likely to drift across to the reader will mean much to him, particularly if he is at all unfamiliar with their place of origin. May I say how it strikes a compatriot?

But to do so one must go back in time. In 1853, Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, asked Sir Stafford Northcote and Sir Charles Trevelyan to prepare for his use a report on the general condition of the Civil Service. In November of that year the report appeared, a highly conscientious piece of work, complete with criticisms from eminent administrators and educationalists and with replies to these criticisms from the two authors. Amongst other things the report recommended that the old system

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of patronage—whereby, as Bright said, the Service was the outdoor relief department for the aristocracy—be abandoned, and instead recruitment be effected by open examination. This dry, practical document was one of the great formative factors in the creation of modern English culture: for it secured the establishment of the class out of which this culture sprang.

Nor was this result so alien or so tangential to the motives of the reformers as one might suppose. Undoubtedly part of their inspiration was the desire to have an efficient bureaucracy and to remove excrescences of which Dickens' Circumlocution Office was no great parody. But another aim, of which they showed themselves to be not totally unconscious, and between which and the original purpose of the operation they saw no real conflict, was in some way to "provide" for the younger generations of the new middle class: not of course in *any* way, but in a recent and suitable way. For there were around, in increasing numbers, young, intelligent, conscientious men who were not particularly interested either in money-making or in money-spending, who wanted to do something for others, provided that doing so would also do something for them. They wanted a worthy, respectable yet comparatively lucrative occupation. It was quite evident that a reformed Civil Service, if such a thing could be brought into being, would be the answer to their problem.

By 1870 the recommendations of the report had been implemented in full. Meanwhile the older universities, shaking themselves out of their eighteenth-century slumbers, had come to see that increasingly their role would be to prepare young men to take up their place in the reformed bureaucracy: or if not exactly in the bureaucracy then in some other profession that by virtue of resemblance or of propinquity to the bureaucracy had acquired a parallel status and respectability. The result of these various operations was that something like a funnel or chute was set up in the very middle of English life: graduated in degrees marked "Public School, Oxford or Cambridge, Profession": and into this chute and up it were drawn, in their generations, the sons of the middle classes, instructed, as they progressed through it, in the classics, in the value of character, and in distrust of the emotions. English culture, as it exists today and

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as it has existed for nearly a hundred years, is to be understood in terms of, even if it is not wholly produced by, what comes out of the top of this chute. Both the good features and the bad features of the culture are very intimately connected with this fact: on the one hand, for instance, the closeness of the intelligentsia to practical concerns, and on the other hand, a large number of less desirable features, which it is not my duty here to rehearse.

In recent years something has happened. The bottom of the chute has been unmistakably splayed out so as to bring into its field not just the children of the middle classes but also the cleverer children of the working-classes. An important qualification is that the public schools remain the preserve of the middle classes, but, setting aside this anomaly and the extent to which it weighs educational opportunity in favor of one class, one may say that today access to the professions via Oxford or Cambridge is, both in theory and practice, open to all. It is merit that counts: not class or money.

But all this has been achieved without there being any corresponding change in the old nineteenth century pattern of life, society and culture. In England there is a far greater social mobility than there was: but what is on the move, moves along old established channels. Under the new dispensation the role of Oxford or Cambridge is to absorb the abler and more ambitious sons of the working class into the bourgeoisie—or, in the case of the less successful, to equip them for some comparatively classless role in one of the interstices of the hierarchy. I remember seeing this process at work in Oxford in my own day. And if one suspected that it was done at a price, at the cost of considerable pain and emotional confusion, one also thought that the pain and confusion were justified, that they were necessary evils in what couldn't be anything but a long and tedious process: the "liberalization" of English life. And around the whole process there grew up, need I say, the conspiracy of silence, which is the inevitable embarrassed response of English gentility to anything that relates to class conflict or class difference.

Two years ago Mr. Potter broke the silence. I don't mean that no one had ever broken it before, but he broke it very effectively. At a time when people were deceiving themselves into

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thinking that Britain was a totally fluid society, Potter wrote an article in the *New Statesman* describing in detail the anguish of a working-class boy in a good Oxford college. He described the awkwardness of his relations with undergraduates coming from very different backgrounds, and who, in their rooms, their girls, their clothes, their conversation, showed the difference, *wore* it one might say. But the anguish of the story is not here. It lies rather in the change that a scholarship effects in the relations between a working-class boy and his working-class parents. In some cases, the result may be that the boy is ashamed of his parents. Those in a sense are the easy cases, and certainly not the ones Potter is thinking of. His cases are where the boy feels gratitude to his parents for what they have done for him: and yet realizes that what they have in effect done for him is to push him into a world that is different and apart from theirs: and no sooner realizes this than wishes he didn't, for how can one remain for long conscious of "the two worlds" without making a qualitative judgment between them? And not only is the boy aware of the two worlds, but three times a year he has to perform the physical journey between them.

Potter describes these things excellently: with a little exaggeration perhaps, but with no more than is pardonable. For the courage it must have taken to set it all down is considerable. And now that we have the descriptions between the covers of a book, I hope that they will secure a wide audience. Much of what he says is bound to cause considerable surprise even to those who feel that they know English life well. The class system in England is not what it was. It is now more like an "open" prison than the old-fashioned penitentiary it used to be: indeed at any given moment a large number of its members are out on parole. But the appearance of freedom, of continuity in social life that this gives is in part illusory, and this book for all its rhetoric is calculated to call one to a better sense of reality.

It is, however, quite another matter when Potter passes from description to diagnosis and cure. For what he stated in the *New Statesman* article and what survives as the center-piece of *The Glittering Coffin* is essentially a *personal* problem, a problem about feelings and emotions, to which one could think of a

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variety of possible solutions. One might, for instance, think that toleration, or a measure of stoicism, or the working through to a more realistic conception of what is and what isn't important in life would be the best means of transcending the problem.

But Potter denies this. According to him the problem is a cultural one. By which is implied that it arises from the conflict of two cultures, and that a solution to it must consist in the elimination of this conflict. Personally I am skeptical about this diagnosis. I suppose that there is a sense in which we can talk of a working-class culture and a middle-class culture in England, but it must be emphasized that this is a very loose sense indeed, and not one in which the confrontation of two such cultures is tantamount to a cultural conflict. For confrontation means conflict only when a culture contains as part of its constitution jealous things like values and exclusive attitudes. But is this true of either of the so-called class cultures of England? I cannot see anywhere, either in this book or outside it, any reason to be sure that such is the case.

Of course what there is a great deal of in England is snobbery. But snobbery is no part of either of the two class cultures. It is an attitude *about* class and its *differentia;* it is not itself one of the *differentia.* Snobbery is in effect the attachment of value to differences of habit and behavior that have in reality no significance. And therefore the fact that we think it is snobbish to make so much of class differences is some evidence that we are not here dealing with rival ways of life that cannot peacefully co-exist in a plural society.

But suppose that Potter is right in his diagnosis of the evils in our transitional society as arising out of the clash of cultures, there are at least two solutions other than the one that he gives, and these he passes over. The first solution would be the gradual diffusion of existing middle class culture so that it became the culture of the society. Potter gives no reasons for rejecting this solution—which after all has been inspiration of many educational reformers—but what his reasons would be can, I think, be inferred from his treatment of the second alternative solution, to which I shall immediately pass. This is the transcendence of the existing class-cultures into an all-embracing "classless" culture: a process

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which is certainly well on its way in this country, and which is generally referred to as "Americanization." Now, significantly, it is for this, for what he calls "the synthetic, Madison Avenue-concocted way of life" that Potter reserves his deepest contempt. He cannot deny that Americanization is likely to produce and diffuse a higher standard of living than anything known in the past, but this he dismisses not just as an advantage that is outweighed by other disadvantages but something that is not really an advantage at all. It ministers, he asserts, only to conditioned wants and imposed choices—though he nowhere subjects these concepts to the scrutiny they deserve. But for him the real trouble with classless culture is not its content, but just its classlessness: its lack of roots, its non-organic character. And from this we can reconstruct why Potter would reject the universal diffusion of middle-class culture: his argument would be that if this culture were universalized, it would inevitably lose its class character, and losing its class character it too would become synthetic and lifeless.

So we arrive by elimination at the true solution: the reconstitution of working-class culture. The idea is one that is much in the air, but it must be said that in *The Glittering Coffin* it is argued for even more perfunctorily than is usually the case. For what is there—we have the right to ask—what is there in working-class culture to be reconstituted?

It is tempting to assimilate the problem with which Potter deals to another to which it bears a strong resemblance: that of the children of immigrant groups in a new society. For we might think that it is highly desirable that these children should benefit from the kind of "race-less" education that a plural society has to offer, and yet at the same time retain some of the distinctive cultural features of their racial group. And the experiment of the New World has shown how difficult this is for the non-privileged, i.e., non-Anglo-Saxon, groups to achieve. It is the justifiable boast of the Jew and the Negro that he can come up from the bottom and yet retain his cultural peculiarities. Can the same be said for the Pole, for the Greek, for the Chinese?

But the analogy is deceptive: for of course in the case of those groups who cannot preserve their distinctive culture, we

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know at the same time that there *is* a distinctive culture that they might have been able to preserve. But do we have the same assurance about the working-class boy? What on this score do we find asserted if we comb our way through *The Glittering Coffin*? I cannot see that Potter in his celebration of working-class culture manages to claim as its manifestations more than the following: football matches; chapel twice a Sunday; street carnivals; and the ability to turn one's back on the television. And if someone urges that it would be fairer to judge working-class culture by its distinctive attitudes rather than by its distinctive products, it seems to me that these relate almost exclusively to courage under adversity: and, it should be said, under adversity that an advanced industrial society need no longer tolerate.

What sort of basis do we have here for the culture of the future? That Potter cannot see the obvious answer to this question can be given a dual explanation. In the first place, he confuses dream and reality. On to the grim enough accounts of life in the mining villages of the Forest of Dean, he projects a kind of William Morris utopia, in which every job done is a job worth doing, where a man fulfills himself in his daily work, where everyone is bound to his fellow workers by ties of community and brotherhood, and in which the higher interests of man rest upon the more lowly interests, so that the genius at the top speaks in the vernacular and out of the experience of all. Some find such a utopia a dream of overwhelming appeal. I happen not to. But whatever our predilections on this subject, it cannot be denied that this would in no way count as a true picture of working-class Britain twenty, fifty, a hundred years ago. The second reason why Potter is so absurdly over-optimistic about the future of working-class culture is that for all his talk of culture he really is not interested in or concerned by the subject on any level higher than that of a hobby. To the arts, to the free occupations of man, to the expressive function of culture, he shows himself indifferent, if not cold. At one or two points in his book he detects the first marks or intimations of a sunrise on the damp, murky, English horizon. Where does he see these marks? In Free Cinema, in the Royal Court Theatre, in the Theatre Workshop Stratford. Now I have no wish to decry these efforts. There is much here that is

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intelligent, much that is amusing, much that is disturbing, a great deal that is lively and provocative: but little that is substantial, and even less that is vigorously creative. I cannot believe that the main stream of the art of our future will stem from this thin trickle of social realism.

The Glittering Coffin was conceived as an act of political dedication: an effort by a young man who would "very much like to make a career in politics" to remind himself as he grows older and stuffier of "what I once believed and hoped": a kind of *memento vivere*. But, it may be said, what has all this about class and culture to do with politics? And Potter's answer would be, roughly, Everything. For him and those who think like him the future of progressive politics in England, and of the Labour Party in particular, is to be found in the "oblique" approach to politics. And by this what is meant is that political programs should be created out of our awareness of what we wish society to be like, that practical policies should be composed under the influence of some vision of men living and working and creating together.

To this approach I am not unsympathetic. But surely it is unjustified to call our speculations about society and culture "political" until we have worked our way back from the more imaginative vision to some suggestion, however fragmentary, of how the vision can be realized. Furthermore, to attack the suggestions of others not because they disagree with what ours are or would be, but just because they *are* practical suggestions and not visionary speculations, is absurd. Potter criticizes the Labour leadership for its "cautious and feeble pragmatism," but he nowhere suggests a single step, not one, that he would take beyond it. His criticisms are directed not against the play, but against the production: and a bit, it must be said, against the accents of the actors. If Potter were not such a young man, one might well think that oblique politics was going to be another word for misguided thinking.

Richard Wollheim

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POETRY CHRONICLE

SUMMER KNOWLEDGE, NEW AND SELECTED POEMS: 1938-1958. By Delmore Schwartz. Doubleday. $4.95.
KO, OR A SEASON ON EARTH. By Kenneth Koch. Grove. $1.75.

A volume of collected poems by Delmore Schwartz has been long overdue. In the case of talents as early-flowering and distinguished as his—he had published poems of real maturity and found a definitive voice at an age when the best of the post-war generation were still occupied with Czerny exercises—retrospective views are always rewarding and sometimes startling. As it is, we shall have to make do for a while with a carefully pruned selection, framed in a very deliberate fashion. The arrangement of this book is really more thematic than it is synoptic or systematically chronological. The poems in the first half all date from the time of *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* (1938), Mr. Schwartz's first book, with the addition of some material from *Genesis* and *Vaudeville for a Princess.* A great deal of the first book has been retained, including, I was glad to see, the long poem "Coriolanus and his Mother", which with its prose entr'actes and interpolated commentary by Freud, Aristotle and Marx antedates "The Sea and the Mirror" of Auden and remains, I feel, quite as distinguished an analogous work. All of these earlier poems are gathered together under the heading of "The Dream of Knowledge" (the subtitle of the Coriolanus poem). The second section of the book, the "Summer Knowledge" itself, consists almost exclusively of new poetry written during the past five years, in sufficient quantity and quality to make up two impressive enough volumes. The book closes with the misplaced "Starlight Like Intuition Pierced the Twelve," by its author's own admission his favorite lyric.

The effect of the selection and the arrangement is not to trace anything like a stylistic development, but rather to proceed in a kind of huge, perceptible quantum-jump from one poetic corpus to another one. What most readers will agree in thinking of as Delmore Schwartz's most characteristic mode is perhaps best exemplified in poems like "In the Naked Bed, in Plato's Cave," "A

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Dog Named Ego, the Snowflakes as Kisses," "The Ballad of the Children of the Czar"; in lines like "The scrimmage of appetite everywhere," and

> *Socrates stands by me stockstill,*
> *Teaching hope to my flickering will,*
> *Pointing to the sky's inexorable blue*
> *—Old Noumenon, come true, come true!*

This earlier poetry is a kind in which the leap from reports and considerations of personal experience into gleaming universalities of human life is given force by the interplay of feeling and idea in the subject matter. We see the young poet allowing the different sorts of reality embodied in his great texts for study—Plato, Aristotle, Freud, Hegel—and in the *schreck* at the family dinner table to meet on the grass of an intellectual playground, wrestle with each other and come to terms, if not to love. There is an apocalyptic quality given to the treatment of the most gently private of personal events by virtue of the fact that they are always on the brink of the relentless current of the life of the mind. Robert Lowell is the only other poet of his and Delmore Schwartz's generation to control just this sort of intense lyric power. But Lowell's early poems depend for their content upon a personal myth of Boston whose Puritan, mandarin past and Roman Catholic present, somehow fallen and somehow redeemed, aim together at the death of feeling. Delmore Schwartz's New York (even more his Cambridge, Mass. which seems in his poems to become an invisible fringe at the borders of Harvard Yard) is no projection of his own inner battleground, however, but rather the home, the here, the now, from which universals, the ever, the everywhere, leap up before the astonished, awakening intelligence. Even the meter of these earlier poems makes a music embracing both studiousness and passion: the solemn, heavy downbeats of the four and five-beat lines and the rhymes that, when present, are usually insistent, bring even the unruly and recalcitrant extra syllables (as in the third line quoted above from "Socrates' Ghost Must Haunt Me Now") under a control that finally acts to give feeling a more expressive voice rather than stifling it. Of these poems, the one called originally "For Rhoda" has always

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excited me the most. It concludes in generalities and abstractions set aflame by the concrete experiences that led to their recognition:

What is the self amid this blaze?
What am I now that I was then
Which I shall suffer and act again,
The theodicy I wrote in my high school days
Restored all life from infancy,
The children shouting are bright as they run
(This is the school in which they learn . . .)
Ravished entirely in their passing play!
(. . . that time is the fire in which they burn.)

Avid its rush, that reeling blaze!
Where is my father and Eleanor?
Not where are they now, dead seven years,
But where they are now (where are they now?)
But what they were then, both beautiful;
Each minute bursts in the burning room,
The great globe reels in the solar fire,
Spinning the trivial and unique away.
(How all things flash! How all things flare!)
What am I now that I was then?
May memory restore again and again
The smallest color of the smallest day:
Time is the school in which we learn,
Time is the fire in which we burn.

Perhaps it is only because lines like these have been anthologized into a classic rightness and authority that the distance between them and those of the "Summer Knowledge" section of the book seems to be more than one created by the passage of time alone. That distance is widened by differences which are not merely formal, but which involve disparities between intentions, subjects and general concerns. The section's (and the book's) title poem begins:

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Summer knowledge is not the winter's truth, the truth of fall,
the autumn's fruition, vision and recognition:
It is not May knowledge, little and leafing and growing green,
blooming out and blossoming white,
It is not the knowing and the knowledge of the gold fall and the
ripened darkening vineyard,
Nor the black, tormented, drenched and rainy knowledge of
birth, April and travail,
The knowledge of the womb's convulsions, and the coiled cord's
ravelled artery, severed and cut open,
as the root forces its way up from the dark loam . . .

Plainly, we are in another world, if not in another universe. The formal subjects of these recent poems are mainly music, children, summer and poetry (this last in a group of *centos,* or mosaics of quotation, of Baudelaire, Sterne, Swift, Hölderlin, and, inevitably, Shakespeare). But they are all, somehow, about spiritual growth and the terrible toll it exacts from the human soil it springs from. Throughout these poems, images of ripening fruit, quickening animal life, dramatically active weather, fire and water extend themselves. Again and again, the same image will be given a slight turn and used anew: "the phoenix knowledge of the vine and the grape near summer's end"; "The phoenix is the meaning of the fruit, / Until the dream is knowledge and knowledge is a dream"—indeed, the phoenix image seems to be central to all the new poems. What dies here is the energy of the intellect, somehow; what arises from its ashes is a vitality that we are to take as being more general:

For, in a way, summer knowledge is not knowledge at all:
it is second nature, first nature fulfilled, a new birth and
a new death for rebirth, soaring and rising out of the flames
of turning October, burning November, the towering and
falling fires, growing more and more vivid and tall
In the consummation and the annihilation of the blaze of fall.

The poetry that built a burning bridge between Plato and Coney Island seeks a redemption, in Mr. Schwartz's recent poetry, from

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youth, from certainty, perhaps ("And the only wrong in all my song / Was the view that I knew what was true," he sings in "The Foggy, Foggy Blue"). The idea of poetic ripening (late Shakespeare, late Henry James, vegetative imagery, relaxations of meter and syntax—many such impulses stand hovering about these new poems) seems to have replaced, or rather, engulfed, all others: history, irony, society, the concerns of the city poet, hardly exist at all here. Sometimes we get glimpses of former subjects in an occasional image or fragment of a scene ("And I thought I heard the fresh scraping of the flying steel of boys on roller skates / Rollicking over the asphalt in 1926" or "In the ultimate box-seat and balcony of the blue" or "Eva and Sinbad, dead these seven years.") But the emphasis is always on the absorption of the old experiences by the new, rather than the creative reliving of the memories.

Technically, these new poems are quite remarkable. They are not really written in lines in the sense that the earlier poems are; the long lines and verse paragraphs stem not so much from Whitman or from psalmody via Christopher Smart as from the impulse to produce incantations and spells. At its most successful, there is a hypnotic quality about the music of this new poetry, resulting from the manipulation of faintly-heard interior rhymes, syntactical parallels and morphological patterns. Poetry, in one of the poems is invoked as

The reality of the imagination
The throat of exaltation,
The procession of possession,
The motion of meaning and
The meaning of morning and
The mastery of meaning.

But even as when, here, the lines are short, they tend not to be memorable. It is even hard to pick out whole poems: so many of them seem to fuse into one another, to gloss and amplify each other. But I should say that "Seurat's Sunday Afternoon along the Seine," a magnificent piece about *La Grande Jatte,* the three sections of "Narcissus," "Once and for All" and a few others are

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outstanding as self-contained performances. One cannot help but remark on the fact that what we might call a metrical decomposition has gone along with an increasingly abstract, less manifestly personal content, while the recent shift in Robert Lowell's style, also in the direction of prosodical irregularity, has led him to deal more and more with nuggets of fact. One wonders, in both cases, where the development is to go from here.

Whether or not this style has been wrung from certain particular spiritual and aesthetic crises, or whether, in fact, it has in any way evolved from preceding material, neither this book nor the uncollected parts of Mr. Schwartz's published work can tell us. These new poems are writing to be grateful for; and even when they are almost unbearably diffuse or else pregnant with an implicit flood of concrete meaning that never quite manages to break forth, there is real authority in their accents. The two disparate halves of *Summer Knowledge* are obviously meant to stand in the relation of promise and fulfillment, the prophecy and the ripened promise. If, for the earlier poems, mystery is often a dreamed memory of childhood, so, for these, knowledge becomes a dream of youth and is itself transcended in a new sense of nature. What will happen in Mr. Schwartz's next book one hesitates to guess, but one can hope that they will turn the attention of the spirit away from its own rebirth and back to the outer world again. The pain and struggle of metamorphosis are evident throughout the new poems; I should like to feel absolutely certain that the struggle has been redeemed, the while

> *. . . pain ticks on, now all and nothing must be borne,*
> *And I remember: pain is the cost of being born.*

Kenneth Koch's *Ko, or A Season on Earth* is a long, very funny, mock-heroic poem in five cantos of *ottava rima,* dealing with, but mostly digressing from, the rookie season with the Brooklyn Dodgers of a young Japanese pitcher of talents scarcely to be believed. The very first line is programmatically mock-epical, dutifully opening the poem strictly, by the book, *in medias res,* with a kind of ingenuous deadpan literalness: "Meanwhile at the Uni-

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versity of Japan / Ko had already begun his studies . . ." begins Mr. Koch, with nary an invocation of the muse. "Meanwhile," however, remains his favorite word throughout the poem, robustly shoving the divers episodes into their lines in a kind of narrative relay-race, guiding the reader about the face of the globe whereon the action rambles, substituting for structure and maintaining a semblance of order. These various episodes involve the adventures of, among others, a British proletaran named Huddel; a private detective named Andrews; a kind of Sax Rohmer international manipulator with a fixation on dogs; and a poet named Joseph Dah who is not content with metaphor but demands in life and art a real *becoming*—Mr. Koch calls him an 'action poet,' and, as his daughter Doris explains to her lover Andrews as her father rushes into the cabin of a yacht in the form of a dog,

> *Dad's integrity*
> *Makes him, unlike most poets, actualize*
> *In everyday life the poem's unreality.*
> *That dog you saw on deck with steel-gray eyes*
> *Was but a creation of Dad's terrible musical potency.*
> *Then seeing the dog there made him realize*
> *That the dog was himself, since by himself created,*
> *So in this poem it's incorporated!*

(Even this stanza, by the way, reveals some of the poem's most common resources in the near Miltonic parody of the penultimate line as well as in the strained gag-like humor in the "I-don't-care-if-it-doesn't-rhyme-or-scan-very-well-the-last-three-words-are-a-*riot*" quality of the fifth one.) The plot of the whole poem keeps cross-cutting from one of these stories to another, returning to Ko and the Dodgers and a crucial game with Cincinnati from time to time, and every once in a while bringing two or more of its strands in a deliberately over-contrived fashion, while Mr. Koch crows with delight over the coincidences he has engineered. The poem's narrative technique must be traced back to Ariosto, I think, rather than merely to Byron (who is, of course, obviously present here and there); the comic impulse is more toward a rich, zany riot of improbability than toward the embodiment of a

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satiric perspective in Don Juan's peculiar kind of innocence, for example. The confrontation of innocence and experience in various forms is present throughout *Ko*. But it is always used for local humor and never as a basic conceptual framework for the narration. The characters in this poem have no inner lives at all—perhaps Mr. Koch's reversal of Rimbaud for his subtitle constitutes a kind of declaration of war on most contemporary writers' notions of what experience is. In general, though, it is never the poem's comic mechanism.

I think that it would be a mistake to compare *Ko* with, say, Auden's *Letter to Lord Byron,* which is much more of a brilliantly skilled pastiche, and, in its way, very much more serious. Mr. Koch's successes are of a different sort, and occur whenever *Ko* erupts most naturally into imaginative excesses. My favorite episode occurs in the first canto after Joseph Dah has locked his daughter and her lover in a coffin and thrown them into the sea:

Meanwhile in Kansas there was taking place
A great upheaval. High school girls refused
To wear their clothes to school, and every place
In Kansas male observers were amused
To see the naked girls, who, lacking grace,
Were young, with bodies time had not abused,
And therefore made the wheatfields fresher areas
And streets and barns as well. No matter where he is

A man is cheered to see a naked girl—
Milking a cow or standing in a streetcar,
Opening a filing cabinet, brushing a curl
Back from her eyes while driving in a neat car
Through Wichita in summer—like the pearl
Inside the oyster, she makes it a complete car.
And there were many sermons on the subject,
And autoists, come in to have the hub checked

On their old car, would stand and pass the day
With talking of the various breasts and waists
They'd seen throughout the week, and in what way

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They thought the thing, according to their tastes,
Was right or wrong, that these young girls should stray
Through Kansas without even stocking pastes
Upon their legs . . .

As can be readily seen, Mr. Koch attains no "answerable style" here: he is often trapped into Ogden Nashisms or worse; half the time he triumphs over his demanding stanza form in expounding the story as he has obviously wanted to, the other part of the time using the form only to abuse it and to let it snarl back and take bites out of his story. He commits himself to a name for a character solely because of the exigencies of rhyme (a coach named De Bruins only enters the scene to rhyme with "ruins," but remains on throughout the poem, growing no more real at each mention of him). The stanzas are seldom end-stopped. One of the characters, we learn, had great skill "In juggling figures and in making millions. / At seventeen he joined the firm of Trillians, Trillians, Trillians, Trillians, Trillians, Trillians, / Trillians, Tull and Trillians, Limited:" But all this is calculated irresponsibility. The whole poem is quite like Terry Southern's indescribable novel, *Flash and Filigree,* in making a point out of keeping something up longer than could be believed possible. In going nowhere it stops at some outlandish and hilarious spots. But for a poem whose only conceivable subject is the accomplishment of its own completion, this is something of a real success.

John Hollander

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FICTION CHRONICLE

FALSE COIN. By Harvey Swados. Atlantic, Little Brown. $4.
PURSUIT OF THE PRODIGAL. By Louis Auchincloss. Houghton Mifflin. $3.75.
THE BODY'S CAGE. By Benjamin DeMott. Atlantic, Little Brown. $4.
THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY. By Flannery O'Connor. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $3.75.

Harvey Swados's *False Coin* is one of those solemn, overwrought, testimonial novels which annoy the more frivolous critics without quite reaching over their heads to the wise grey polls whose favor is being courted. I am going to be uncharitable to Mr. Swados on Hamlet's debatable theory that sometimes you need to be cruel to be kind. Otherwise the abused idealism that *False Coin* personifies will only be worse compounded.

Among other things, it sets out to be nothing less than a contemporary version not only of *The Blithedale Romance* but also of Trilling's *The Middle of the Journey*. It is *the* super-ego novel of the season, muscle-bound with high moral purpose, dripping with honest intellectual sweat. Here, for example, is the teen-age son of a Central European sociologist (successor to the Central European artists and psychologists of an earlier day) describing his father:

> Thor shook his head violently. He said, without looking at me, "I couldn't hate him, not when I admire so much about him. I admire his systematic mind, and the way he can put aside personal considerations when he's involved in a research problem. I admire him for his scientific neutrality."

But of course Thor *does* hate his father, little monster of perverted rationalism that he is, and eventually commits an impressive triple suicide by swallowing sleeping pills, cutting his wrists and drowning himself in a bathtub. Thor is one of the more likable agents caught up and crushed in the juggernaut of rationalized liberalism which Mr. Swados, following his distinguished models rather than his natural instincts, has obliged himself to despise, which he bodies forth as an elaborately implausible scheme

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for manufacturing art by committee, "A massive attempt to heal the crazy split between mass culture and art, between lowbrow and highbrow, not by asking the artist to water down his work, or by force-feeding the general public with abstract art, but by undoing the barriers that separate the two." The language of this definition alone should be enough to insure the Project's futility. But Mr. Swados's stance is so shaky that you never can tell when he is satirizing a point of view and when he is not. At any rate, the whole complicated business runs aground on the mild reluctant professional idealism of Mr. Swados's rather portentously ingratiating narrator, a recording engineer who refuses to connive in the faking of a passage of music written specifically for trombones but for budgetary reasons played and recorded on the cellos. This, Mr. Swados impresses upon us, is the grain of sand in the shoe of Progress, this heartless tinkering with even so banal a work as the music in question promises to be. Implacable forces are set in motion, the Congressional jackals close in . . . terror, dismay, defeat, the failure of love and the loss of reputation and job. It reads, to be sure, like a parody of recent history, but not nearly a good enough parody. Mr. Swados has an appetite for life and certain substantial gifts which unfortunately lose most of their effect in the pious clamor of this over-ambitious novel.

If Louis Auchincloss did not exist he would have to be invented. He is a classic example of the "pure" and therefore, by definition, neglected novelist, like Irving, the early James, Edith Wharton, Santayana and the early Marquand, a perennial refugee from the sheer work required in assimilating the great fabulists and romancers. Our appetite for work has created the great monolithic reputations; our nostalgia for Eden has created the anti-reputations, the neglect a little more apparent than actual, of writers like Auchincloss.

Reviewing *Pursuit of the Prodigal* in the *Nation,* George P. Elliott, a critic with a mind of his own, writes that Auchincloss is "a real pro at the difficult craft of constructing and developing a plot," that "all he lacks as a novelist of manners is adequate control over the form he has chosen, a difficult form, it is true, but proved to be sound." I reluctantly take issue with these judicious remarks. It seems to me that all Auchincloss lacks is a

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sufficient excuse for being a *novelist* at all. He is a remarkably fine satirist, affectionate, observant, penetrating, but he lives only in his digressions, as many of his contemporaries and subjects live only on weekends.

Or perhaps you can say that all he lacks are readers who can forget what they learned in college about the form he *ought* to have as a Novelist of Manners (Jane Austen) and read him for what he is, an accomplished chronicler and wit. As each of his recent novels has proved more clearly than its predecessor, there *is no* ideal form for Mr. Auchincloss. *Pursuit of the Prodigal* is somewhat neater and more efficient than *Venus in Sparta* or *The Great World and Timothy Holt* but also poorer in entertainment. In order to work up plots to match the energy of his perceptions and language, Auchincloss has to abandon any pretense of being a pure novelist of manners and take his people out into the cold, draughty, muscle-clenching professional world of counting-house and bar. That this masculine agonizing, these wire-drawn crises of conscience, are reasonably well done I don't dispute for a moment. But it is essentially Horatio Alger stuff and no more flavorsome than the same kind of thing in Cozzens. Like tennis you like it or you don't; compared with Trollope I would say that Mr. Auchincloss finds it irksomely necessary, not engrossing for itself. His Wall Street-Long Island society, *as a society,* no longer has the momentum to generate plots of the required intensity.

But there is a deeper justification than mere plot-carpentry in these rarified questions of honor in Auchincloss novels; artificial as they may be, they provide a necessary gymnasium for keeping up the Old School tone, for propitiating the eternally hovering Headmaster. Here is the novelist's distinction, that he has taken his schoolboy ideals more seriously than most. They have split him apart; but his satirical half seems not only to require his moralist half for support but is also able to exist beside it quite separately and distinctly.

In any event, he is someone to read; extremely good with old people, decent aunts and selfish aunts, awful old family autocrats, vague and indefinably "wonderful" matriarchs who seem to own most of the property. He nicely hits off those splinter groups of

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the upper crust that send out nervous tentacles towards the great worlds of Politics and Art. His heartfelt snobbery is no more damaging or obtrusive at his best than Mrs. Wharton's at her best. There's a gloomily attractive good humor and independence in Auchincloss that justifies a much better reputation than he apparently has.

If every omnibus review can afford at least one clear-cut *succes d'estime,* then Benjamin DeMott's *The Body Cage* is my choice for this quarter. Without being terribly exciting, it provides an experience of sustained worthiness and promise. Mr. DeMott might allow his manifold pieties to hold him down to the level of another Cozzens, but then again he might not. Like Auchincloss he enjoys the look and feel of things, takes pains to be accurate and clear, has a good ear for several intensities of speech. Better than all this, he has a broad streak, forcibly suppressed in this book, of that specifically American fanatical anti-fanaticism, a gusto for the horrors he is trying to exorcise.

The theme is female spiritual vampirism, its devastation of a provincial weakling householder and the efforts of a wise old doctor to save the son of the family from its clutches. DeMott has pulled off the Jamesian stunt of mixing discreet sexual intrigue with spiritual horror; in its involutions and indirections his book reminds one strongly of *What Maisie Knew.* In the above mentioned review, George Elliott makes an interesting comment on this novel:

> There are no social issues in the book, and not even the author seems concerned with changes and quirks of social custom. Yet every character belongs absolutely to the community they are all in. Their society is one of the understood conditions of their acting and not a thing to be looked at analytically, satirically, proudly, in any detached way at all by them, the author, or the reader.
>
> And this, it seems to me, is the best possible use of society in realistic fiction.

Now with all due respect for a brave definition of realism, isn't this a somewhat emasculated view of the role of society in fiction and doesn't it conflict rather sharply with the same critic's enjoyment of Auchincloss's "satiric and meticulous eye"? What use is a distinction between realism and a novelist of manners if it

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obliges the former to be naive and the latter not? I suspect Elliott of trying for his theory's sake to will DeMott back into Richardson's shoes, to endow him with a specious naiveté. DeMott is not naive, he is merely inhibited. *The Body's Cage* has all the elements of a really extravagant hair-raiser. I'm afraid a good deal of the author's crew-cutted, sensible decorum just goes to waste on it.

Flannery O'Connor is as shrewd, tough and funny as any writer alive. She is also a truly formidable intellectual plotter, a most expert juggler of all those celebrated levels of meaning. I find it virtually impossible to speak of these two sides of her gift in the same tone of voice. On the one hand, a delightful gothic mortuary comedy, on the other a very serious and on the whole successful ethico-religio-mythical drama with nothing less at stake than rationalism vs. faith, true evangelism vs. false, and other impressive oppositions too many to mention. This is far and away the best single thing she has done, an advance in each of the directions explored already in *A Good Man is Hard to Find.*

R. W. Flint

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CORRESPONDENCE

HIP LITERATURE AND SQUARE CRITICS

SIRS:

The criticisms of hipsters made nearly three years ago in my reply to "The White Negro" still hold up (with one exception noted below); but I appear to have made a tactical blunder in publishing them, for some people have garbled and overgeneralized my remarks in order to prop up an unwillingness to sympathize with any bohemia that does not recapitulate the bohemia of their own bygone youth. The latest such distortion may be found in Irving Howe's review of Norman Mailer's *Advertisements for Myself* (*PR,* Winter 1960), and it leads Mr. Howe into other errors.

I made these specific criticisms of hipsters: that their reading is wilfully deficient and their writing poor; that what Mailer takes to be their revolutionary sexual action is merely acting out; and that in his "acceptance" of Negroes the white hipster, instead of making himself truly color blind, sees the world as through his sunglasses, darkly. In ignoring the particularity of these criticisms (as well as my remarks that the hipsters are the only significant new group of rebels, that Mailer is right to extend them his sympathy, etc.), in trying to fashion them into a total rejection of anything that looks "hip," Mr. Howe for one thing blinds himself to certain merits of Mailer's recent fiction.

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The clearest example (there are others) is afforded by Mailer's "Advertisements for Myself on the Way Out," the prologue to his novel in progress. Mr. Howe damns it as "a series of windy speculations" and asks Mailer to show us his "exceptional gifts for social observation and narrative." A more reasonable criticism might note that speculations may be permitted in something the author frankly labels a prologue, and more importantly that the prologue, though consisting mostly of speculations (windy or otherwise), also contains passages portraying the hip world that demonstrate precisely Mailer's "exceptional gifts for social observation and narrative."

Let me suggest that Mr. Howe and like-minded critics reread, for example, the passage in which Mailer describes the encounter of a square physicist with a Negro call girl. Aside from its specifically literary virtues—the economy, vividness and humor with which Mailer establishes the characterizations—it contains observation of a major datum in the world about which Mailer is writing: the hipster's "putting on" of the square. Sometimes such putting on is the result of direct assault, sometimes it takes the subtle form of merely letting the over-eager square put himself on—as the hustler does to the physicist in Mailer's story, or as the good con man does to the mark. The reason it occurs often and the reason Mr. Howe might learn something if he paid attention to it, is this: the hipster, deaf though he may be to the very real virtues

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of Mr. Howe's world, is keenly attuned to its foibles and rigidities. (A hip Negro once said to me, apropos a folksy-artsy socialist, "Man, that banjo bolshevik, he wouldn't even call a *shovel* a spade.") True enough, the American world Mailer describes, though large and growing, is mostly underground despite the Luce papers' embrace of its exhibitionist minority—a world that Mr. Howe apparently has been unable to experience at first hand, for reasons psychological or ideological (not chronological, since there are both hipsters and square hangers-on older than Mr. Howe). All the more reason, then, that Mr. Howe should welcome good "social observation and narrative" of that world.

I find it especially disturbing that Mr. Howe should utterly reject the hipsters at this particular time. He would turn his back on the hip world at precisely the moment when it is, at long last, coming up with a few people who show signs of being able to write as well as howl. Mr. Howe ought to see *The Connection*. Mr. Howe ought to learn that for all the limitations of the hip world-view—I agree that there are plenty—there is a great difference in *literary* achievement between the crepitations of Kerouac and such recent work as, say Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book*. If Mr. Howe really is interested in "exceptional gifts for social observation and narrative" then he ought to read John Rechy's "The Fabulous Wedding of Miss Destiny" (in *Big Table,* no. 3)—a hip story of the homosexual world

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that reveals the comic and tragic aspects of that world with astonishing pace and intensity and an ear as good as Ring Lardner's, and alongside which our academic critics' favorite recent "comic" novel, *Malcolm,* seems witless as well as gutless, a chi-chi fairy tale.

There is a kind of protest literature, valuable both as protest and as literature, that is produced neither by political ideologues nor by mindless howlers—a literature written by men from the bottom (or at least men willing to go live on the bottom and take a good look around) that is impassioned, violent, yet artistically coherent. Surely Mr. Howe would not deny literary merit to such representatives of it as Celine and Genet (nor deny it to Henry Miller's first and best book, *Tropic of Cancer*). Well, it looks as if the hipsters may soon give us Celine and Genet; certainly such writers as John Rechy, Alexander Trocchi and Jack Gelber, for all their mistakes of a technical sort that usually beset the novice writer, are serious candidates. As for Norman Mailer's newer fiction: recently Alfred Kazin put it down by remarking that Mailer's trouble seems to be that he is trying to become the American Marquis De Sade. But would it really be such a bad thing if American letters produced its own De Sade?

Ned Polsky

Mr. Howe replies:

SIRS:

Ned Polsky's letter seems to me an instance of Misplaced Polemic.

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With some of it I agree; some not. But really, what has most of it to do with my review of Mailer's book? For in that review I did *not*:

propose a total rejection of "anything that looks 'hip' ";

criticize Mailer for showing "sympathy" for hipsters (clearly, for Mailer, a great deal more than *sympathy* is involved);

deny that speculation is permissible in the prologue, or any other part, of a novel;

commit myself one way or another on the astonishing range of topics Mr. Polsky manages to cram into his letter.

I was reviewing a book by Norman Mailer, not discussing "hip literature," a category of whose existence, let alone relevance, I have some doubts. These doubts are not relieved by the casual way Mr. Polsky tosses in the names of Celine, Genet and Henry Miller, none of whom, so far as I can tell, is readily assimilable into "anything that looks 'hip'."

True, I said nothing about the work of Messrs. Trocchi, Rechy and Gelber: perhaps because I was asked to write about the work of someone else. But even if these writers are as good as Mr. Polsky claims, how would that affect either my analysis or judgment of *Advertisement of Myself?* A critic who insists upon so fine a distinction as that between a shovel and a spade ought to be able to recognize the difference between a review of Norman Mailer and a disquisition on several other people.

Irving Howe

NOTE: "Soviet Literature in the Doldrums" by Max Hayward in our Winter, 1960 issue is a slightly expanded version of an article that appeared originally in *Problems of Communism.*

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